Juan Iñigo Carrera

Knowing capital today.

Using *Capital* critically

Volume 1

The commodity or free consciousness as a form of alienated consciousness

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Translator's Note

The following translation of Juan Iñigo Carrera's work '*Conocer el capital hoy. Usar críticamente El Capital*' was accomplished via machine translation software, such as Google Translate. As a result, tonal and stylistic differences between the original Spanish text and this English version are inevitable. I have attempted within my limited power and allotted time dedicated to this translation to remain as faithful as possible to the author's original intended meaning. Finally, please expect grammatical, syntactical, and semantic issues that are inherent to machine translations. Chapters 1, 2, and 3 were already translated on cicpint.org, I merely appropriated them to reproduce the work in its unity here; credit for these chapters may go to Leonardo Kosloff.

Introduction

The question

Reading *Capital*? The mere question evokes difficulty, complexity, contradiction. Was there not someone who began by writing a book for "reading *Capital*", boasted about not having read it fully, and closed the contradictory circle writing the prologue for an edition of *Capital* where he *imperatively recommended* to begin by skipping the whole first section of the work?

Proposals of one-sided readings rain down on us given the complexity of the question. One author proposes to "read *Capital* politically". Another considers his reading a "philosopher's reading". And yet another one proposes to leave out anything that does not concern "ethical foundations". Of course, there is no scarcity of authors who read it as a text of "political economy". There is even the author who proposes to read it with the indiscreetness implied by not having a concrete question other than "seeing what is in there". But, are not politics, economics, ethics, philosophy, all of them social forms, social relations, whose unity cannot be split without completely mutilating the content of each one of them?

Is it then a question of *interpreting* the text in its unity? Will the solution perhaps be to face the reading with the intention of interpreting the world by interpreting Marx? This does not seem to be a clear way out of the problem. In the first place, there are those who threaten us with inevitably falling into "the most vulgar interpretation of the theory of value, which directly contradicts Marx's theory" if we literally abide by the text written by him. But, above all, how do we overlook the absolute contradiction set out by Marx between *interpreting* the world and *changing* it?

If we refuse to interpret the text, how are we to confront it? Will we attain an objective perspective of it if we follow the recognized precept of looking in it for its "Logic (in capitals)"? But then, what will we do with Marx's explicit rejection to operate through the development of logical contradictions, since logic is "*alienated thinking*, and therefore thinking which abstracts from nature and from real man"?

Would it not be better to listen to those who say that it is not very useful to read it because it is "a model" which corresponds to nineteenth century England but that it is not "applicable" to, for example, modern Argentina? Furthermore, does not the scientific community consider *démodé* and obsolete any text after a handful of years of its publication given the speed with which reality changes?

But then what? Are we to leave out the text and begin an independent development from zero on our own? We would hardly progress beyond re-discovering gunpowder this way. Although, it would doubtless be worse to follow those who propose that we read *Capital* in order to "believe with Marx" in the existence of this or that social relation.

To come out of all these convolutions we do not have at this stage any recourse other than going back to the beginning. And what if we stop looking at *Capital* as an object for us to read and rather establish our necessity to read it, up to this moment simply present from the beginning as an immediate condition, as the object which *Capital* is to account for? But, in that case, it would not be a question of reading it anymore but of using it to answer for our own

necessity. Thus, our starting point cannot be other than confronting the determinations that our necessity to use *Capital* immediately presents us with in the process of producing our own consciousness. And in this way the first question which is at stake is the very form of our process of production of knowledge. It is there then, where we will begin.

Cognition and recognition

Cognition is the process wherein the living subject carries out a limited expenditure of its vital energy, that is to say, of its material corporeality, with the object of appropriating the potentiality of its action with respect to the potentialities of the medium over which it is going to act. In this manner, the living subject governs the full expenditure of its body which it needs to carry out in order to appropriate its medium, not simply virtually but now effectively, and thus reproduce itself. In other words, cognition constitutes the moment of the action in which this action organizes itself to virtually appropriate its own necessity.

The process of human life has as its generic determination the appropriation of the medium through labor. That is to say, it operates through the bodily expenditure applied to the transformation of the medium, only then to appropriate the result of this transformation so as to reproduce the body itself. This generic determination is not simply restricted to labor per se, but it has the social character of labor as its foundation. That is, the body expenditure carried out by an individual to transform his/her medium, his/her individual labor, results in a product which is useful for other individuals to reproduce their bodies, thus determining such labor as social labor. The process of human life is a process of social metabolism founded on labor.

The complexity of the process of social metabolism develops the materiality of cognition in a concrete form which becomes constitutive of the human generic being: consciousness. The characteristic human action, social labor, is necessarily ruled through a process of cognition which knows itself as such, that is, which knows itself as the process of organizing human transformative action.

Conscious knowledge is the product of the individual subjectivity of who produces it, thus ruling his/her concrete action. But it does not abstractly spring from this subjectivity. This subjectivity is the bearer of the powers of the process of cognition as itself a product of general social labor and, for what is specifically important here, of social labor applied to the development of conscious knowledge; that is, of social labor applied to the organization of social labor itself.

When an individual advances in his/her cognition over a concrete object hitherto unknown to him/her, he/she carries out an original process of cognition from his/her own individual standpoint. But insofar as that concrete object has already been cognized by another individual who has provided his/her knowledge with an objective social existence, and which therefore may be appropriated by the consciousness of others, such original individual cognition is determined as a process of recognition from the social point of view. Each original process of individual cognition thus acquires the powers given to it by virtue of being a concrete form of the reproduction of social knowledge. And, with its own reproduction, the process of individual cognition itself develops the distinctive powers of a process of recognition. The potentiation of the individual processes of conscious cognition as processes of recognition

from the social point of view is the most genuinely human form of developing the productive forces of social labor.

The most powerful form of human cognition to transform the medium into a medium for human life is that which confronts the potentialities of the medium as existences whose objective necessity is exterior to its own subjectivity and that, at the same time, confronts its own subjective potentialities as objective existences. This is scientific cognition.

Logical representation is the absolutely dominant form of scientific consciousness in our time. This representation starts from taking concrete forms as existences whose objective necessity resides in the simple fact that they present themselves as exterior to the subject. Then, this modality of cognition takes the concrete forms reduced in this manner and presents them again to itself in their exteriority, that is, it represents them, as expressions of a necessity whose objectivity is given by the selfsame repetition of their existence. In this manner, the concrete ends up represented as collections of objective existences, which are in themselves a product of the first representation, under the form of categories or concepts. Due to the very form under which the objective necessity has been represented in them, these concepts and categories are, from this point onwards, emptied out of the possibility of bearing in them a necessity which would be able to confront the process of cognition as a potentiality with the capacity to set itself in motion on its own. Subsequently, to integrate these concepts and categories in the construction of the knowledge of the singular concrete object to be acted upon, they must be linked in an exterior way through a general structure of relations of necessity which corresponds to the representation of the objective necessity by virtue of the repetition of the selfsame existence. This constructive necessity –in turn constructed through the abstraction of any concrete content which does not fit in with the reflection of any real relation as a necessarily exterior relation-, which intervenes by mediating in the movement of concepts and categories which constitute the representation, is logic.[1]

This modality of scientific cognition possesses an enormous power to rule the action over the medium, by way of producing in the latter quantitative changes which are objectively known to produce a determinate qualitative transformation. But, the first hindrance that logical representation imposes to its own transformative power, resides in the fact that the exteriority of its ideal unfolding with respect to the real necessity turns over itself, forcing it to represent itself as an instance external to action. On the one hand, the moment in which the action is ruled, winds up represented as a process of cognition abstracted from the action itself, that is, as the production of theoretical knowledge. On the other hand, the moment in which the action effectively appropriates the medium is represented as the exclusive constituent of the action, which is to say, as pure practice. In the best of cases, the real unity existing between both moments is represented as an exterior relation to them, in which the theory informs the practice and the practice informs the theory in a "more or less" trend that cannot be defined through its

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[1] Marx unequivocally shows the character of logic:

"Logic [pure speculative thought] is the currency of the mind, the speculative thought-value of man and of nature, their essence which has become completely indifferent to all real determinateness and hence unreal, alienated thought, and therefore thought which abstracts from nature and from real man; abstract thought. The external character of this abstract thought..." (Marx, Karl (1844), "Economic and Philosophic manuscripts", Early Writings by Karl Marx, Penguin Classics, 1992, p.383)

own norm, that is, as praxis.

Given the form of the course followed originally to produce the logical representation of a determinate real concrete, from the social point of view the process of recognition does not need to confront this concrete object in its real existence itself. It suffices with representing the original representation as being a consistently objective one. The characteristic form of such process of recognition is the assimilation to the existent theory. It is then a question of analyzing the texts in which this theory has taken an objective social form.

By stopping at the exteriority of that which exists, logical representation bears in itself the limitation inherent in the fact that its own objectivity cannot go beyond being an interpretation of reality. This limitation over its reach has become today the vainglory of logical representation. It is proud that, effectively, any objective representation, that is, any theoretical construction, is a form of interpreting the existing reality, of interpreting the world in one way or another. As a result of which, as regards the process of recognition from the social point of view, the point is about interpreting the world in various ways by interpreting this or that author in this or that way. And, then, we run into the proclamation that the point is to interpret the world by interpreting Marx in one way or another, as the basis for the organization of the action which is to supersede the capitalist mode of production. But the impotence to surpass interpretation is the very negation of the capacity to rule action through the fully objective knowledge of its own determinations. "Free interpretation" is but the ideologically inverted form with which the absence of liberty with respect to one's own determinations is presented, which implies that action is to be organized without knowing these determinations beyond their exteriority.[2]

Therefrom comes the impotence of any logical representation to be a form to rule the action which bears the supersession of the capitalist mode of production insofar as this supersession consists, inherently, in the development of the action ruled by an objective consciousness able to transcend all exteriority. It is not without reason that Marx directly opposes interpretation to the necessity of the transforming action: "Philosophers have interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it".[3]

The necessity of the action which is to supersede the capitalist mode of production confronts us, then, with the other existing form of objective knowledge, namely, dialectical cognition, "the reproduction of the concrete by way of thought."[4]

Dialectical cognition does not stop when confronted with the exteriority which the concrete presents it with, but it only recognizes this concrete in its objectivity by virtually penetrating it to appropriate its necessity as a potentiality to be realized. This will then thrust

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[2] As Engels expresses it:

"Freedom of the will therefore means nothing but the capacity to make decisions with knowledge of the subject. Therefore the freer a man's judgment is in relation to a definite question, the greater is the necessity with which the content of this judgment will be determined;[…][freedom] is therefore necessarily a product of historical development." (Engels, Frederick, Anti-Dühring: Herr Eugen Dühring's revolution in science, Moscow, Foreign Languages Press, 1959, p.157)

[3] Marx, Karl, 11th thesis on Feuerbach, "Theses on Feuerbach", Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society, Indianapolis, Hackett Pub. Co. Inc., 1997, p. 402.

[4] Marx, Karl, Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy, Penguin Classics, 1993, p. 101.

dialectical knowledge further within its object, to recognize it in its objectivity as bearer of the necessity of the potential necessity. It thus continues to probe into the objective necessity of its object until it finds this necessity in its simplest form of an actual existence whose potential necessity is no other than the necessity of transcending itself, that is, of transforming itself. The subject of the action ruled by dialectical cognition then discovers that, to appropriate its own potentiality in relation to its object, it needs to ideally accompany the development of the necessity of the object until reaching it in its determination as a potentiality which has the action of the subject in question itself as the necessary form of the realization of the object.

The dialectical process of individual cognition which confronts its object as one already belonging to social knowledge cannot take as its starting point the existence of this previously objectified knowledge, to then represent it as the basis of its own objectivity. If it followed this path, it would cease to be a reproduction of the concrete by way of thought, to therefore acquire the exteriority of a representation. Its own form forces it to penetrate by itself –needless to say, in a virtual manner- inside the real concrete which it confronts, to then ideally reproduce its potentiality as the form with which the action of the subject is to be ruled.

What the existing dialectical knowledge provides to its process of recognition is no more than, although certainly no less than, the possibility of confronting the concrete over which it is to act now having a guide as to what necessity it is to seek in the concrete. What was a tortuous search for the strictly original knowledge with no guides other than its coming and going, for the process of recognition it consists in the possibility of probing directly whether the necessity is that which is already known. But it is only a guide. As soon as the process of recognition discovers in its singular concrete a necessity different than that which the existing knowledge was heading it to, or discovers one which transcends it, it needs to, thereupon, constitute itself into a purely original process of cognition. Hence, every individual reproduction of dialectical cognition inevitably subjects to critique the then existing social knowledge, making it account for its validity as such.

In *Capital*, Marx unfolds for the first time in history the reproduction by way of thought of the necessity which determines the historical reason for being of the capitalist mode of production and the action of the working class as the bearer of its revolutionary supersession in the development of the community of freely associated individuals; that is to say, of individuals capable of ruling their action by objectively knowing their own determinations beyond any apparent exteriority. And he does this giving this original cognition an objective social existence which makes it appropriable by others, the form of a published text.

From *Capital* onwards, any reproduction by way of thought which advances over the determinations unfolded in it is, from the social point of view, a process of recognition. But, as I have already developed elsewhere, "it is not a question of reading *Capital*; not even of studying it. It is indeed a question of confronting by ourselves the real forms of capital to reproduce them ideally, with the potency that we obtain by having at our disposal the ideal reproduction of these forms as unfolded in *Capital*."[5]

We are justified in saying then, that we count with a double advantage over Marx to

[5] Iñigo Carrera, Juan, El capital: razón histórica, sujeto revolucionario y conciencia, Buenos Aires, Ediciones Cooperativas, 2003, p. 243.

objectively know the historical potencies of the capitalist mode of production and the determination of the working class, that is, our own determination, as subjects of its supersession. In the first place, we count with the product of Marx's social labor to potentiate our advance in the free organization of the human life process. Secondly, we are confronting today the concrete object of our action, capital, under much more historically developed forms than those Marx confronted in his time. Concrete forms which existed as potencies barely insinuated, requiring an enormous effort to discover them -and Marx truly advances over them prodigiously- are today within our reach developed in a fully present manner. All of which signifies our responsibility as historical subjects whose action, which is to supersede the capitalist mode of production, is founded in the collective production of a consciousness capable of ruling its own action with the objective power of dialectical cognition.

With no other intention than giving raw expression to the critical relation between cognition and recognition, we could also say that what is important is what one finds by unfolding his/her own process of dialectical cognition. And this is precisely because what each one is producing is the organization of his/her own action as an organ of social life. What Marx found by developing his own process of cognition was Marx's problem, what we find in the concrete real which we confront, be it the same or not as what Marx found, that is our problem.

The present work aspires to be used. In fact, its own process of gestation has fed on that purpose. In the same way in which it is the product of long years of solitary elaboration - although certainly fueled by the unyielding critique of the comrade Luis L. Denari- it also is, in large measure, the product of having been utilized as a tool in workshops organized as a form of political action, that of the participants and my own, not to read *Capital*, but to use it critically. In this sense, it has been gestated as a product of a labor performed in a directly social manner, which has developed my individual subjectivity as its author.

The exposition is developed in two sections. The first reflects the course which my cognition follows as I advance over the concrete forms that I confront in the process of consciously ruling my action. The second directly reflects the character of a process of recognition from the social point of view of the determinations originally discovered by Marx in *Capital*. In it, my own individual analytical investigation and subsequent unfolding of the necessity show how they advance using the already existing process of cognition as a guide. In fact, the second section was written before the first one and was the main foundation for the development of the latter. This is why the second section contains an outline of aspects and ways of facing the question which are fully unfolded in the first part. At the risk of being repetitious, I have left those outlines bare in order to accentuate the link between the two parts of the book.

The formal contrast between the two sections already makes manifest the way in which dialectical cognition subjects itself to its own critique every time it reproduces itself accompanying the selfsame reproduction of its object and the necessity of acting upon it. At those places where I essentially find myself reproducing the development already present in *Capital*, the first part will be limited to showing the synthesis of this development, necessary for further advance. At those places where my process of cognition advances over forms which transcend in their concrete development the point reached by Marx, as well as those places where I advance discovering concrete determinations which differ from those found by Marx at

the same juncture, the first section will take on an original life of its own.

On the other hand, and with no intention nor capacity to emulate Julio Cortázar, whomever uses this work may invert the order of the sections with no problems, if this is the more useful way in which the necessity of developing his/her own thought process presents itself to him/her.

The present volume constitutes the first step in the development of the work. It advances over the determinations of the commodity until recognizing it in its condition as the simplest form which is taken by the general social relation in the capitalist mode of production. This is equivalent to saying that this first step advances until it recognizes itself as expression of the consciousness which affirms itself in its freedom, not by abstractly denying its determinations, but by knowing its own necessity insofar as the latter determines it as a consciousness alienated in the social powers of its own material product.

In its original edition, this preface included some general observations about the different Spanish translations of *Capital*. I am obviously unable to do the same with respect to the English translations. Nevertheless, there is a noticeable particularity shared by the three English translations generally available that needs to be considered. In Chapter 1, Marx explicitly synthesizes his discovery of private labor as the historical specific character of commodity producing labor by stating: "Nur Produkte selbständiger und voneinander unabhängiger Privatarbeiten treten einander als Waren gegenüber" and "Gebrauchsgegenstände werden überhaupt nur Waren, weil sie Produkte voneinander unabhängig betriebner Privatarbeiten sind."[6] Strict translations to English would read: "Only the products of self-standing and mutually independent private labors can confront each other as commodities" and "Useful objects become commodities only because they are the products of mutually independently operated private labors." All Spanish translations agree in the expression "mutually independent private labors" for "voneinander unabhängiger Privatarbeiten." Conversely, English translations omit this direct expression by appealing to terms that are alien to the original text. The translation by Samuel Moore and Edward Avelling reads: "Only such products can become commodities with regard to each other, as result from different kinds of labour, each kind being carried on independently and for the account of private individuals" and "As a general rule, articles of utility become commodities, only because they are products of the labour of private individuals or groups of individuals who carry on their work independently of each other."[7] Eden and Cedar Paul translate: "The only products which confront one another as commodities are those produced by reciprocally independent enterprises" and "Useful objects only become commodities because they are the products of the labour of individuals or groups of individuals working independently of one another."[8] In turn, Ben Fowkes translates: "Only the products of mutually independent acts of labour, performed in isolation, can confront each other as commodities" and "Objects of utility become commodities only because they are the products of the labour of private individuals

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[6] Marx, Karl, Das Capital. Kritik der politischen Ökonomie, Band I, Frankfurt, Verlag Ulstein, 1981, pp. 24 and 52.

[7] Marx, Karl, Capital. A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1965, pp. 42 and 72-73 (numerous other editions, including MEGA).

[8] Marx, Karl, Capital, London, J. M. Dent & Sons, 1946, pp. 11 and 46.

who work independently of each other."[9] One cannot but wonder how these inaccurate translations that repeatedly omit the original "private labor" may have predisposed the substitution of a so-called abstract labor for private labor as the historically specific character of labor in the capitalist mode of production, as prevails today among English-speaking Marxist theoreticians.

Nevertheless [and returning from here on to the translation of the Spanish preface], leaving aside the fact that each one could find an edition to be more or less accurate or readable than other, essentially, this is not what matters. The point is that a critical reading of *Capital* imposes on its subject the necessity to face capital as such. Therefore, no difficulty that could be imputed to the original text, or to its translations, can raise an insurmountable barrier to the development of the necessity to rule one's own action with full objective knowledge of the cause, nor be used as an excuse to evade that necessity.

All italicized or emphasized texts included in the bibliographic quotations belong to their original sources; none of them has been added or removed. Original text that has been intercalated for the sake of clarity is included inside brackets []; double brackets [[]] indicate text added by me.

[9] Marx, Karl, Capital, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1982, pp. 132 and 165.

Chapter 1

The reason for being of value or price according to political economy

The question of why things have value, exchange value, or price,[1] is the starting point of all economic theory.[2]

Neoclassical economics provides a direct answer to this question: things have exchange value when they are useful, that is to say, they are goods and they are scarce.[3] In other words, goods have a price because they are useful and scarce.[4] This is the cornerstone over which the complex mathematical structure of marginalist concepts is erected.

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[1] Political economy commonly uses the three terms indistinctly. We will abide by this criterion, to the extent that we move in its terrain.

[2] In the words of Adam Smith:

> In order to investigate the principles which regulate the exchangeable value of commodities, I shall endeavour to show: First, what is the real measure of this exchangeable value; or, wherein consists the real price of all commodities. (Smith, Adam (1776), An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations, The University of Chicago Press, 1976, p.33)

[3] According to Walras:

> […][U]seful things limited in quantity are valuable and exchangeable. Once all things that can be appropriated (that is, all scarce things and nothing else) have been appropriated, they stand in a certain relationship to each other, a relationship which stems from the fact that each scarce thing, in addition to its own specific utility, acquires a special property, namely, that of being exchangeable against any other scarce thing in such and such a determinate ratio. An individual owning anyone of these scarce things can, by giving it up, acquire some other scarce thing which he lacks. He can get what he does not possess only on condition that he surrender some other scarce object which he has in his possession. (Walras, Léon (1874), Elements of Pure economics, or the theory of social wealth, translated by William Jaffé, Richard D. Irwin Inc, 1954, p.67)

Jevons expresses the same concept affirming that:

> A commodity is any portion of wealth-anything, therefore, which is useful, and transferable, and limited in supply. (Jevons, W. Stanley (1878), Political economy, Forgotten Books, 2010, p.16)

[4] Stonier and Hague synthesize the question unequivocally:

> The fundamental question which price theory sets out to answer is: "Why is it that goods and factors of production have prices?" Put quite baldly, the answer is that they have prices because, on the one hand, they are useful, and on the other hand, they are scarce in relation to the uses to which people want to put them. Stonier, Alfred and Hague, Douglas (1953), John Wiley & Sons Inc, 1967, p.9)

In turn, classical political economy has compounded a different definition as its starting point: things have price, or exchange value, because in order to be useful, they are products of labor. Or, exceptionally, because they are scarce, in the sense that being products of labor, it is beyond the control of labor to produce them in line with demand (for example, in the cases in which the use value of the good is based on having sprung from the singular subjectivity of its author, as it occurs with works of art and, even more, with those whose author is defunct).[5] Indeed, the modern theoretical constructions based on this conception of the reason for being of price do not have the level of mathematical sophistication of those of neoclassical economics. Even so, they do not have much to envy the latter in, for example, the models developed following Sraffa.[6]

In any of its two offshoots, the complexity and mathematical rigor of the conceptual constructions of economic theory seem to put it beyond all doubt.[7] However, let us ask both theories of price an elementary question.

Suppose we go to a restaurant and we are offered ravioli. The dish is excellent, although frankly expensive. The next day a friend invites us to eat in his house. He cooks for us ravioli, kneaded with his own hands and prepared with a recipe exactly the same as that of the restaurant. The result is equally splendid. The ravioli smell so good that we wish they were "as abundant as air itself". But, when we see the contents of the saucepan, we realize that they are too scarce to satisfy the demand of all companions at the table. Even then, our portion is similar

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[5] For Ricardo:

> Possessing utility, commodities derive their exchangeable value from two sources: from their scarcity, and from the quantity of labour required to obtain them. There are some commodities, the value of which is determined by their scarcity alone. No labour can increase the quantity of such goods, and therefore their value cannot be lowered by an increased supply.[…] These commodities, however, form a very small part of the mass of commodities daily exchanged in the market. By far the greatest part of those goods which are the objects of desire, are procured by labour, and they may be multiplied,[…]almost without any assignable limit, if we are disposed to bestow the labour necessary to obtain them. In speaking then of commodities, of their exchangeable value, and of the laws which regulate their relative prices, we mean always such commodities only as can be increased in quantity by the exertion of human industry, and on the production of which competition operates without restraint.[…] That this is really the foundation of the exchangeable value of all things, excepting those which cannot be increased by human industry, is a doctrine of the utmost importance in political economy… (Ricardo, David (1817), Principles of political economy and taxation, Prometheus books, 1996, pp.18-19)

[6] Sraffa, Piero (1960), Production of commodities by means of commodities, Cambridge University Press, 1975.

[7] 7According to Walras:

> […][G]iven the pure theory of economics, it must precede applied economiçs; and this pure theory of economics is a science which resembles the physic-mathematical sciences in every respect.[…] why should we persist in using everyday language to explain things in the most cumbrous and incorrect way,[…] when these same things can be stated far more succinctly, precisely and clearly in the language of mathematics? (Walras, Léon, op.cit., pp. 71-72)

to that of the restaurant. Only when we rise from the table do we realize, at last, that the ravioli served by our friend are different from those in the restaurant. This time, eating the plate of ravioli has not cost us one cent. Why have these ravioli, kneaded, cooked and served by our friend, come to the world, and left it, fulfilling the reason for being of any good, namely, to satisfy a human need, without having had any price or exchange value at any point of their existence? How do neoclassical economics and classical political economy explain this circumstance?

From the standpoint of neoclassical economics, the ravioli of the restaurant have a price because they are useful and are scarce. But, as it happens, the ravioli of our friend are also useful and scarce, and yet have no price. The answer would seem to lie in the fact that the ravioli of the restaurant are "economic" goods, while the latter are not. However, this only leads us to another question: what are economic goods? The neoclassical answer leads to a dead end: they are the goods which have a price. And: why do they have a price? Because they are useful and are scarce. But this is precisely what the ravioli of our friend are. So then, why do they not have a price?

Another alternative would appear to be that there is a different intentionality in one and the other producer of ravioli: the owner of the restaurant makes them to sell them, our friend, to please us and himself. Another version of the same argument would be to explain the presence or absence of price by the existent relation between the producer and consumer. However, neoclassical theory is clear in that intentionality plays no role whatsoever in the determination of price. In no place does it say that utility and scarcity are necessary but insufficient conditions, so that one would have to add the intentionality of sales, for the goods to have a price.[8] The same occurs with respect to the personal relations between producers and consumers. It is no accident that neoclassical economics commonly chooses air as an example of a useful good which lacks price by reason of its abundance, so as to set it in opposition to economic goods.[9] In the case of air, it is clear that there is no difference of intentionality or relation between persons which may turn it into a non-economic good. It is simply its natural attribute. On the contrary, neoclassical theory has a univocal response to the question of why goods are bought and sold, namely, because they are useful and are scarce. Likewise, it defines economics as the "science which studies the allocation of scarce resources to facilitate the satisfaction of multiple goals",[10] a circumstance which our friend had to resolve to pamper us, without making his ravioli

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[8] In the words of Stonier and Hague:

> In order that any such goods may be priced, and may therefore be eligible for consideration in price theory, they must be useful and scarce. (Stonier, Alfred and Hague, Douglas, op.cit., p.9)

[9] Walras, Léon, op.cit., p.65 ; Jevons, W.Stanley, op.cit., p.15 ; Stonier, Alfred and Hague, Douglas, op.cit., p.9.

[10] In Samuelson"s terms:

> Economics is the study of how men and society choose, with or without the use of money, to employ scarce productive resources, which could have alternative uses, to produce various commodities over time and distribute them for consumption, now and in the future, among various people and groups in society (Samuelson, Paul, Economics, seventh edition, McGraw-Hill book company, 1967, p.5)

acquire price, that is, without making them an economic good.

It could also be argued that the reason why the ravioli of our friends lack price is that there is no demand and supply relation for them. Yet, why are goods demanded and supplied? Because they are useful and scarce. And, what are our friend's ravioli but that?

Perhaps it would seem that, in reality, the ravioli of our friend does have a price, only that this has a peculiar aspect: the satisfaction of our friend in pampering us, or our thankfulness to them for their generosity. This explanation starts by disregarding that price, in its most elementary meaning, is the quantity of a thing which is given in exchange for another.[11]

Neither personal satisfaction, nor the thankfulness of someone, is in the category of "things". On the other hand, even in the absurd situation that one may pay to oneself the price of one's own product this would leave the individual in question in possession of exactly the same things that he had before the supposed exchange: they would have given themselves, and received from themselves, one and the other good. However, our friend is full with satisfaction, but with no ravioli in their hands. In turn, even if we were, absurdly, to consider thankfulness a "thing", it is clear that we are perfectly able to leave our friend's house with a full stomach and giving him no thanks at all. Moreover, it could be the case that the "friends" of our friend would, far from being thankful, simply gobble up the ravioli while laughing to their insides at such an idiot who has cooked for them without receiving in exchange anything but their thanklessness. But if someone tried to leave the restaurant without paying, they would end up in the police station.

There is one last alternative. It could be said that, in reality, the ravioli of our friend does have a price, but that this is not manifested due to the friendly relation that we have with him. This but introduces through the window the difference due to a social relation which neoclassical economics expels through the door. However, it evinces an inherent content in the neoclassical conception: goods have a price because of their own nature and that they could lose it in exceptional cases or due to the existence of some special social relation. This would mean that, when a mother breastfeeds her son, she would be "forgiving" him the price which her milk has by nature as a useful and scarce good. To be coherent with such nonsense, it would have to be claimed that, when a cow feeds her calf, her milk has a price by nature. As it happens, the natural biological process which unites each of these mothers with their offspring, and therefore, the natural relation which is established in each case is, in essence, the same. No matter how much a father may complain to his son: "this is how you pay everything I've done for you?", it is clear that when he took care of rearing his child he did not do it because he was expecting to receive his love, or even less, "things", in return. Nor did he do it because he was willing to forgive him such debt. He did it because it was in his personal nature as a father.

Such is the dead end to which neoclassical economics takes us to, so let us turn to classical political economy then. Here the question seems to be different due to the intervention of labor. Yet, the problem reappears. Our friend, just as the cook of the restaurant, has worked strenuously to make the ravioli. However, no matter how much our friend has exerted

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[11] Stonier and Hague make this clear from the very beginning:

> The price of anything is the rate at which it can be exchanged for anything else.
> (Stonier, Alfred and Hague, Douglas, op.cit., p.9)

themselves; their labor was incapable of introducing the least exchange value into the ravioli. His ravioli are a product of his labor; nevertheless, they have no price.

Up to this point, we can confirm that for neoclassical economics price is an attribute of useful and scarce goods. In turn, for classical political economy, labor has the natural attribute of producing goods with price. For the former, goods have a price by their own nature, for the latter, labor produces exchange value by its own nature. However, it is evident in historical, anthropological and archeological studies that price is a very recent phenomenon in the two to three million years since the human being has constituted itself into a distinct animal species by the development of a capacity to transform nature in a means for itself through labor. That is, price is a recent phenomenon in human history. In fact, its generalized and universal existence as a dominant attribute of useful things which are products of labor is not even two hundred years old. Only with the development of the capitalist mode of production, have goods with price become the dominant expression of social wealth.

Perhaps there are those who believe that the impotence of economic theory to locate the reason by which some goods have price and others do not, is merely a question which acquires importance only in the field of theoretical subtleties. However, in the first place, we cannot forget the purpose of all science. The object of science is to produce the consciousness capable of ruling human action with the potencies that this action acquires by knowing its own determinations beyond all appearances. So that the action upon economic reality which lacks the capacity to distinguish an economic good from one which is not is thus mutilated on its own foundations as a form to consciously operate over that reality. As complex and rigorous as the rationalization given for this action may appear to be, it could not be more solid than the feebleness of its point of departure. Secondly, the incapacity of economic theory to justify its own starting point is practically manifested in the statistical registry of economic activity.

Any system of registry must start from the qualitative definition of its object. That is, it must start by distinguishing what the attribute is that differentiates the objects which are to be registered from those which are not. The impotence of economic theory to distinguish why an economic good has a price and another one which complies with the necessary conditions does not have it, is revealed in its failure to define the object of national accounting. The modern registry of national accounts does not recognize the qualitative unity which defines its own object. But the economist has no more justification for this fact than to appeal to the, almost mythical, anecdote about Keynes' distress in observing that, if English knights would marry their housekeepers, the national product of England would fall, given that this includes wage labor but not the labor of housekeepers. Thus, after seven decades of history of national accounting, political economy is still incapable of explaining the reason for this exclusion. It is no wonder then, that faced with the impression produced by the apparent depletion of energy sources during the 1970s, the idea that national accounts should register the totality of natural and human energy consumption by society gained popularity. Accordingly, even sleeping would contribute to the social product, due to the consumption of basal energy. Matching the rhythm of the ups and downs for which economic theory lacks conceptual foundation, national accounting practice operates over diffuse limits, where divergent criteria with respect to similar objects abound, and where the higher or lower level of practical difficulty crudely ends up as its

validation.[12] For example, the renting imputed over one's own housing is registered, but not the rental imputed over one's own car, even though cars and houses are goods which consumption goes by in exactly the same way and which are commercialized both through selling and renting.

But the confusion occasioned by the impotence of economic theory to discover the reason for being of price does not stop at this stage of the registry of economic activity. At first glance, the accounting of companies seems to be immune to such confusion because it appears immediately clear that only objects with price lie in its field. However, economic theory makes sure of transmitting its own incoherencies to it. It maintains that, as the science in charge of defining the reason for existence of price, it is also the one which must define the criteria to register individual economic transactions. And, as is obvious, the practical criteria used by accounting firms are utterly uncongenial with the abstract categories of utility and scarcity. For example, accounting must reflect the value of advanced capital to measure the profit generated as a function of the juridical rights established between buyers and sellers by the difference against it. In consequence, it finds the criterion of valuation supposedly based in the larger or lesser utility which corresponds to a personal consumption later or earlier in time, that is, the purported marginal utility which decreases in time, completely alien to itself. Nor is the question here reduced to the technical subtleties of registry. In the beginning of the 1980's, the federal government of the United States initiated a trial against IBM, accusing it of mainframe monopoly (i.e. abuse of monopoly profits). Besides its team of lawyers, IBM hired two experts in economic theory. The report produced by these economists maintained: a) even though the accounting registries of IBM showed a rate of profit over capital superior to the one showed by the registries of American Motors (by then bankrupt), this information could not be considered indicative of which company, according to the precepts of economic theory, was the more profitable one; b) there was no way of transforming the accounting information in terms which would be meaningful from the point of view of economic theory; c) that, therefore, it was impossible to reach any definitive conclusion, in tune with economic theory, with respect to IBM's profitability.[13] How, then, could IBM be accused of making monopoly profits if it could not even be established whether it was making profits of any sort? Given the expansive potential that IBM's capital has been showing since then, it seems likely that its executives have managed to resolve in practice the dilemma which its economic theorists declared insoluble, under the pledge of claiming the truth and nothing but the truth.

Neoclassical economics and classical political economy, that is, political economy as a whole, has taken us to its own dead end. We have no road forward open to us but one: the critique of political economy.

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[12] Ohlsson, Ingvar, On national accounting, Konjunkturinstitutet, 1953, pp. 194-195.

[13] F. Fisher and J.McGowan, "On the Misuse of Accounting Rates of Return to Infer Monopoly Profits", American Economics Review, 73, 1983, pp. 82-97.

Chapter 2

The commodity as social relation

2.1. The starting point of the Critique of Political Economy: The social specificity of the commodity

Let's stop for a moment. What is the purpose of centering our attention on the critique of political economy? Is it perhaps that we are to convince the economists of how erroneous their theories are? The very name of 'political economy' makes it evident that what is at stake is something very different, to wit, the question of political action. Why, then, do we not put aside political economy, and its world of abstract economic forms, and concretely face the question of political action? That's it, let's follow this road! Let's act to transform the existing social reality in the capitalist mode of production.

Our first step has, inevitably, the form of a question: what concrete form will we give our political action? What is to be done? If our political action is to be ruled by the knowledge of its necessity, that is, if it is to be a conscious action, our next step has again the form of a question: what is the necessity of our political action?

To answer that question, we first have to know what a political action is. It is commonly understood that a political action is the exercise in an antagonistic relation between different classes of individuals which expresses opposed interests. But, what are these opposed interests to which our political action concretely refers? Someone who may have become exasperated by now will tell us that it is obvious that the fundamental antagonistic character in our society derives from the struggle of the working class and the capitalist class. However, if our action is to be ruled by a consciousness which will not be deceived by appearances, as it happens for political economy, the only step we can take is to formulate a new question: what is the necessity which determines the working class and the capitalist class as such? Again, the answer may seem obvious: the ways in which they partake in the social product; the wages of one, the profits of the other. But, what are wages, what are profits? Of course, the flows of income which emerge out of the movement of capital. Right, and what is capital? A sum of money that is put in motion with the end of transforming it into more money. But, what is money? A thing which is used in the market to mediate sales and purchases. What is the market? Why, the place where commodities are exchanged. What is a commodity? A useful object, a good, which bears the capacity to transform itself into another without any material operation acting upon it, that is, a use value which bears exchange value. And, where does the commodity, unlike other use values, get such a property from?

The question regarding the necessity of our political action contains inside itself the question which constitutes the starting point of the critique of political economy. The next step in the conscious organization of our political action and, therefore, in the realization of our

political action itself, takes root in the analysis of the commodity. It is not a question of convincing the economists of anything, but of answering to ourselves what the necessity of our own political action in the capitalist mode of production is about.

Political economy believes that the price or exchange value which certain goods or use values have is a natural attribute lying in them or the labor which produces them. But it is obvious that these goods can experience a completely anti-natural transformation: they can mutate their materiality, that is, become another use value for their owner, without anyone materially operating upon them. To do this, it is enough that they go through a process of exchange. For example, the ravioli of the owner of a restaurant can be converted into a pair of shoes, if the owner receives this use value in exchange for them. No matter how our friend put himself to the task of kneading, there is no way he can transform the ravioli into a pair of shoes. The most he can accomplish is to convert them into an inedible lumpy mess. The question we are still facing is: where do the ravioli made by the restaurant's cook get the really fantastic attribute of changing their materiality, without anyone materially operating upon them, from?

Our political action with respect to the capitalist mode of production demands that we answer ourselves this question. Let us analyze the commodity then, starting from its immediate exteriority as the elemental expression of the specific form that presents social wealth in the capitalist mode of production.

2.2. The source of value of commodities

The exchangeability of commodities has an immediate expression: the relation of equality established in exchange, that is, exchange value. For example, 10 plates of ravioli = 1 pair of shoes, or, 10R = 1S. Since grade school we know that we cannot add apples with oranges. Therefore, the mere possibility of establishing this relation of equality, tells us that this equivalence between commodities encloses within it the presence in both commodities of the same quantity of a common quality with respect to which they are commensurable regardless of their other material differences. The possession of this common quality is what enables them to be objects so equal to each other that they may reciprocally permute their materiality, that is, it makes them exchangeable objects.

It appears that asking ourselves about the determination of exchange value puts us in front of an analytical process which consists in searching by elimination, in the universe of commodities, a quality which repeats itself in all of them, and only in them, for the purpose of identifying it with that which equalizes them as exchange values. However, the question which confronts us is of a very different nature. The true question which is posed by the evidence of the common quality expressed in the exchange relation is: what is the necessity which makes the commodity an object bearing such quality and, therefore, an exchangeable object? That is, where does the aptitude of the commodity for exchange spring from? Far from having to extend itself over the universe of all commodities, our analysis must penetrate inside the commodity searching for the necessity which gives it the attribute of exchangeability, which makes it itself, an object capable of entering the exchange relation. That is, the necessity which makes the commodity a value which is expressed in the exchange relation with another commodity as its

exchange value. From the analysis of the exchange value of commodities we pass now to the analysis of the value of the commodity. From analyzing the relation 10R = 1S, we pass now to analyze the plate of ravioli of the restaurant.

Above all, the commodity has the attribute of being a good for use or use value. That is, it is a thing apt to satisfy human needs, a certain something whose materiality exists outside the person who is going to appropriate its utility. It could be that such external materiality is already objectified before the moment in which the person is going to appropriate its utility, or it could be that such materiality is being produced by an action external to the person in the same moment in which the person is appropriating its utility. Although in both cases we are dealing with a good in respect of its utility, political economy has taken care of making the question confusing by calling the first type of use value a "good", while calling the second type a "service".

The eventual inutility of a thing as a use value strips it away from any aptitude for exchange. Without utility, therefore, there is no value. However, the analysis of exchange already revealed that, for the commodity, the exercise of the capacity for exchange is necessarily realized against a use value which is qualitatively different; that the exchange relation 10R = 10R is meaningless because there is no change of materiality. Hence, use value cannot be the source of the aptitude for exchange. On the other hand, just by putting aside our plate of ravioli from the restaurant for a moment, and peering over the plate made by our friend, we readily see that utility is a quality that commodities share with simple goods. Nevertheless, even though our analysis of the commodity has discovered that use value cannot be the source of exchangeability, it does not cease to tell us something essential to discover this cause. The utility, the use value, is an attribute which resides in the body, in the materiality, of the commodity. One must appropriate this body of the commodity to realize its utility, even if this utility be purely imaginary. If someone believes that the ravioli have aphrodisiac powers and not nourishing ones, they are still bound to realize the utility attributed to them by eating them.

But, how has this attribute reached the body of the good? Whatever the attribute a thing has, this is always the result of an action which has transformed the thing into a bearer of it. For example, if the ravioli have the quality of being edible, it is because the action of kneading and the action of the cooking temperature of water have transformed the flour and other ingredients into a digestible substance. Likewise, if the ravioli as a commodity have the quality of being exchangeable, it is because some action has put this quality in it. Therefore, given that utility or use value is a condition for the existence of value or, what is the same, that value is borne in the materiality of use value, the value of the commodity must be the product of some action which has produced its use value. If there were two independent actions concerned in the production of value and use value, this would imply the absurdity that only the action which produces value would be present without the one which produces use value and, consequently, that a commodity would have value without having use value. But, at the same time, it is clear that we cannot simply be dealing with the same action. If that were the case, use value would be the same as value or, in other words, every use value would have value. The action concerned then, must be an action which in its material unity has to intervene in two senses: it must have the double quality of being determinant of use value and determinant of value, which expresses itself in the exchange relation as a simple quantitative equality. Therefore, it must be an action

which, by the materiality of its different concrete modalities, produces different use values and that, at the same time, has a materiality which results in the common content expressed in exchange value.

We can now observe that the scarcity resorted to by neoclassical economics to explain value is the inverted image of the activity which introduces value in it. In neoclassical economics, the action appears as the insufficiency or absence of action. Let us look at the question right-side-up then. One could think, in consonance with economic theory, that the action which puts value in the commodity is the same which subjectively determines its condition as use value. It would pertain to the human action of subjectively valorizing the goods as useful objects. And since in this valorization, without doubt, the effort, that is, the labor that it takes to obtain a commodity, intervenes, it could even be considered that the conception of the exchangeability of commodities of classical political economy is subsumed in it. However, this valorization by individuals occurs with respect to commodities as well as simple goods.

It occurs in the case of our ravioli as well as those of our friends: are they appetizing, would we prefer not to eat them, are we more attracted to them by the effort which took to produce them, etc.? Hence, even the mere external analysis in the search of a repeated attribute, evinces that it is not such valorization which can establish the specific difference which separates some goods from others according to their exchangeability.

It could also be thought that, it is the human action of exchanging a commodity for another itself which inserts the value in them. However, the use value of the commodity is born in its own materiality, and the action of exchange does not alter this materiality in the least. Precisely, exchange is characterized by transforming a use value into another one by leaving the materiality of the commodity untouched. Therefore, in the same way in which the action which produces the use value of the commodities occurs before exchange, its other inseparable face, that which produces value, must do it also. The question does not lie in explaining the attribute of exchangeability which commodities possess by the existence of exchange but, inversely, in discovering how it is possible that an object may transform its materiality into a different one without any material operation upon it, in other words, what the attribute enclosed in this object which explains the existence of exchange is.

The source of value then, is to be found in the actions which configure the process of production of the commodity. In the first place, simple natural actions intervene in this process. For example, in the case of the ravioli, the temperature of water, the hygroscopic properties of the flour, the resistance of steel or aluminum to temperature, etc. In the case of the shoes, the resistance of leather to friction and humidity, the power of steel to penetrate the leather, etc.

Incidentally, there are natural actions which intervene in the production of any use value. Gravity, without going any further, which is materialized in all use values in a common form: weight. However, natural actions can only transform an object into a different one acting upon its materiality, while the exchange of commodities consists, precisely, in the transformation of an object into a different without anything acting upon their respective materialities. Exchange pertains to the transformation in the materiality of a thing without acting upon this materiality itself. Natural actions are impotent to transform, for example, a table into three pairs of pants, while this is what exchange is about.

The alien character of natural actions with respect to the determination of the exchangeability of commodities is manifest when it is seen externally. However, no matter how equal they may be as products of the action of gravity, a pound of lead and a pound of gold have no equivalence relation whatsoever as exchange values; not to mention the weight of a haircut. It is obvious that the exchange of commodities is a human action for which any measure of the magnitude of the natural actions in the production of the use values being exchanged is completely indifferent, even if the diverse forms that such natural actions take up could be reduced to a common unity with a finite magnitude.

Natural actions enter according to their different qualities, and the magnitude corresponding to them into the determination of the aptitude of each commodity for use. And this determination of use value is exactly what is being carried out in our friend's house. For example, there the cooking water boils at the same temperature as that in the kitchen of the restaurant, and the flour is converted into dough by the action of the same hygroscopic properties, without this implying that the ravioli which are produced through these natural actions will acquire value.

The analysis which inquires the potentiality of natural action, and even that which moves in the exteriority of the repetition of the attribute, evince that natural actions have no way of intervening in the determination of the completely anti-natural and purely quantitative equality between materially different commodities which is expressed in their aptitude for exchange.

Together with the simply natural actions, the action carried out by a subject no less natural intervenes in the production of use value, but that distinguishes itself from the rest of nature by its general capacity to appropriate it in order to pursue its own end. This is the human action which rules itself in a conscious and willful manner with the purpose of transforming the materiality of the objects which exists externally to its own body into use values, that is, productive labor, or more simply, labor. To sit down on a pile of flour, and that from this accident ravioli come out, is a human action which, certainly, has nothing to do here. To labor or work is the action of expending one's own body in a conscious and willful manner under such a modality that a use value results from it.

Let us then face labor to see if it is the action capable of producing value at the same time it produces the use value of the commodity. In the first place, the inquiry concerning this capacity transcends labor as such. As we already know, the production of value must be the result of an aspect of labor different from the one which produces use value. Insofar as labor intervenes in production as an action of specific concrete qualities, it generates use values which differentiate themselves from one another by their aptitude to satisfy this or that human need. Thus, the labor which makes the ravioli has a different concrete materiality from that which makes shoes; the former consists in kneading and cooking, the latter in cutting, nailing, etc. However, no matter how different their concrete forms may be, both imply the material expenditure of the human body which executes them, the material expenditure of human energy, in proportion to the intensity and duration of the activity. We are dealing then, with the simple expenditure of human labor power, with the conscious and willful expenditure of human muscles, brains, etc. executed with the end of transforming a determinate object into a use value, whatever the concrete form in which it has been carried out. Such material

expenditure is the materiality of abstract human labor, of which every commodity is a qualitatively undifferentiated product. Therefore, a commodity may transcend its original concrete materiality when being exchanged for another, conserving at the same time its material identity as a product of abstract human labor intact, at the moment in which it confronts another commodity which is the materialization of an equal quantity of this labor. The two commodities may mutate reciprocally their materiality as use values, because each of the poles of the relation conserves its materiality as the product of abstract human labor intact.

Human labor is the action which, concomitant with its concrete materiality which produces different use values, by its abstract materiality also produces these use values with an attribute which makes them apt to enter into the exchange relation as equals. Once the product of labor has reached exchange, this labor has already been expended, it is a past action. Therefore, it has no other way of presenting itself in the moment of exchange than through its result, as the labor which has materialized itself in the commodity.

The magnitude of the attribute which makes the commodity apt to enter into the exchange relation is measured by the quantity of abstract labor expended in its production. In the relation of equality in which this quantity is expressed there is no room for any qualitative difference. But the simple expenditure of human labor power still contains within itself a qualitative differentiation originated in the concrete form in which it has been carried out. It is of no relevance that it has been applied to produce this or that different use value, but of its quality as a simple expenditure of the human body itself: to produce the same use value, a smaller or larger expenditure of human labor power is required according to the ability or disposition of the individual who performs it, or in the technique being utilized. This is, therefore, a qualitative differentiation, characteristic of abstract labor itself, whose whole content is being a quantitative difference. Thus, the material identity as a product of abstract labor which allows a commodity to transform its concrete materiality into another through exchange is not an attribute inherent to the singularity of the conditions in which it was produced. On the contrary, it is an attribute of abstract labor itself insofar as its own materiality exceeds any singularity. And since it is characterized by surpassing a multitude of singular determinations which are independent of each other, such materiality necessarily has the form of normality. Thus, the abstract labor which is capable of being represented as the aptitude of the commodity for exchange is that which the generality of its producers requires to perform it in normal conditions, that is, the socially necessary abstract labor to produce it. Suppose that ½ hour of labor is normally required to produce 10 ravioli plates but that the cooks are using a kneading machine which is so antiquated that it takes them 1 hour. In this case, they will have expended their body for a complete hour, but only half of it will count as productive from the social point of view.

Every expenditure of human labor power is materialized in its product. But for it to be expressed as the attribute which makes this object exchangeable, it is necessary that its producer be not the one who will consume its use value. If they do it, the exchangeable object itself will vanish into thin air. Therefore, the labor applied to the production of the commodity is the expenditure of human labor power carried out by an individual but destined to other people's consumption. From the point of view of its exchangeability it only counts insofar as it is useful for others, that is, insofar as it satisfies a social necessity. We are dealing with the productive

expenditure of an individual's body which will result in a medium for the productive expenditure of another individual's body, or in a medium for the immediate reproduction of another individual's body; that is to say, the product of this labor does not have the satisfaction of the individual producer's process of metabolism as its immediate end, but that of feeding a social process of metabolism. Thus, the labor which produces the capacity for exchange of the commodity is socially necessary in this second sense.

Considered in itself, the human socially necessary abstract labor which has materialized in a commodity, is the substance which gives it its capacity for exchange, it is the value of the commodity.

The expenditure of a larger or smaller normal quantity of labor to produce a use value reflects the productive capacity or productivity of that labor. The more productivity increases, the less the quantity of socially necessary labor to produce each commodity will be. Therefore, the less the value represented by each of the commodity's units will be, but, at the same time, the quantity of them which can be produced in a given time will be larger. During this time the same quantity of labor will be expended as before, but this mass of value will be materialized in a larger quantity of use values. The mass of material wealth produced in a certain quantity of time is directly proportional to the productivity of labor; the mass of value produced remains constant even though the productive capacity of labor changes; the value of each unit produced is inversely proportional to the productivity of labor. If 1 hour of labor was needed to produce a pair of shoes and now only ½ hour is needed, the value represented by each pair will have fallen by half, but in 1 hour of labor 2 pairs instead of one will have been produced. And the value of these 2 pairs together is the one which now represents the expenditure of 1 hour of socially necessary labor. If productivity fell, the relations would be inverted. But the product of 1 hour of labor would still represent the same magnitude of value, even if this were, with the productivity reduced by a half for example, the value of ½ a pair of shoes.

On the other hand, there are labors which can be carried out without requiring any previous preparation. But there are others where a previous period of training is needed. During this period, the future producers expend their human labor power in a private and independent manner. But they do not do it to directly produce a commodity, but to produce themselves as producers of a commodity whose production requires this previous preparation. Therefore, in each hour of labor directly applied to produce the commodity the part proportional to the time expended in developing the necessary aptitude to carry out this production is condensed in it too. Let us suppose that to make a pair of shoes an hour of direct labor is required, but that to acquire the ability to do it would have required expending another hour of labor in the learning process. Then, each pair of shoes would encapsulate 2 hours of socially necessary labor carried out in a private and independent manner, and not simply the hour required in its direct production. This hour of labor condenses, in reality, the expenditure of human labor power of 2 hours and, as such, it is represented as a magnitude of value twice as large. This is then an amount of time of complex labor which has been condensed as the sum of the expenditures of simple human labor power carried out to produce the commodity. In this way, the value of this commodity is determined by the amount of time of simple labor expended to produce it and also that expended to acquire the capacity to do it.

Up to this point it would seem that we have advanced over absolutely firm ground,

accounting for why commodities have value. However, let us stop to look again at the ravioli of the restaurant and those of our friends. We have said that the former have value, that is, aptitude for exchange, because they are the product of the socially necessary abstract labor expended to produce them. But our friends have also carried out an expenditure of human labor power to produce the ravioli. These are also the product of human abstract labor. Human labor is, in our friends' house, just as in any other place and epoch, a productive expenditure of the human body carried out in a determinate concrete form; unity of abstract labor and concrete labor. Besides, our friend could well have worked with the same skill, diligence and technique as that of the cook in the restaurant. And, of course, he has produced them for the consumption of other individuals distinct from him, his friends. Thus, his ravioli are not only materializations of human abstract labor, but materializations of the socially necessary abstract human labor to produce them. Yet, his labor does not appear represented in them as an aptitude for exchange; his ravioli lack value. However deeply we have penetrated into the question, we have not yet accounted for why commodities have value.

Let us look again at the ravioli of the restaurant and their exchangeability with the shoes. This exchangeability is mediated by the fact that we are dealing with different use values and, therefore, with the product of different concrete labors. The cook of the restaurant makes ravioli, but not shoes; his diner makes shoes, but not ravioli. Hence, the cook can wear shoes because the shoe-maker has applied his labor to producing shoes, while the shoe-maker can eat ravioli because another individual has applied his labor to cook them. In the determination of human labor as producer of an object which bears the aptitude for exchange with another there is the mediation of the social division of labor. It is clear that the latter also occurs in the house of our friend: we are able to eat because he has cooked for us. He has carried out a socially necessary labor, also in the sense of having been carried out to provide for the consumption of others. He has done it because we are united by a personal relation of affection, or in general, because there is a personal relation which associates us in a direct manner. He cooks for us, but not for anyone who walks by his door and tries to enter his house. His social labor is organized by the bonds which directly unite his person with the individuals who are going to consume his product. His labor is one which is carried out in a directly social manner.

But, what is the relation between the cook and the shoe-maker in the restaurant? In general, there is no direct personal bond which unites them. It is perfectly possible that they might have never seen each other's faces. The cook has produced the ravioli with total personal independence as regards who is going to consume them. The same has been done by the shoe-maker with regard to who will consume his shoes. Therefore, each one has carried out their labor for the other, their social labor, with independence regarding the other. None of them is subject to the other, nor has been able to subject the other, through a bond of personal dependence in the realization of their respective labors carried out for the consumption of the other, that is, their respective socially useful labors. They are reciprocally free individuals, who lack any bond of personal dependence between them. The decision regarding what to produce, how much to produce, when to produce and how to produce for the consumption of another individual has been an exclusive attribute of the will of each one of them, free of any personal subjection to the other. Conversely, each one of them is deprived of any participation in the organization of the individual labor of the other. Each one of them has full control over their

individual labor process. In order for this to occur, each one is to have full individual dominion over the means of production necessary for the realization of their individual labor. Their means of production are to be their private property, that is, a property which excludes others from access to them. If anyone could have access to the means of production of their owner, he or she would have to bind the organization of their own individual labor to the will of this other person, thus ceasing to be an individual independent of the other. At the same time, each one of our subjects is deprived of directly accessing the other's product, since they lack any personal bond with him. Such product confronts them as the private property of the other. In synthesis, each one has worked for the other's consumption, that is, has realized their social labor, in a private manner and with independence with respect to the other.

As free individuals, the cook and the shoe-maker relate to each other socially only when they exchange what each one has produced on their own account and at their own risk, and it belongs to each one as property which excludes the other from direct access for his consumption. While our friend opens the doors of his house so that we may consume his ravioli because we are his friends, the owner of the restaurant has all the right to deprive of consumption those who do not pay the full value of his ravioli. That is to say, it is not only that the social division of labor mediates the exchange of commodities, but the fact that only the products of labors realized in a manner which is private and independent of each other that enter into exchange.

Let us return then to the strict analysis of the labor which produces commodities. No matter how diverse the concrete material forms in which it is carried out, the social labor realized in a private and independent manner encloses a material determination of its own as simple expenditure of human labor power: it is this expenditure, that is, abstract labor, executed under the specific material form which consists in that the control over itself is an attribute which belongs in an exclusive manner to the individuality, which results isolated, of the individual who performs it. This involves, then, a materiality which remains intact in both poles of the exchange relation even if the concrete materiality of each commodity takes the place of the other. At last, in this materiality which is inherent to the socially necessary abstract labor which is ruled by the full isolated individuality of the one who performs it, we have found the attribute which is specifically inherent in the commodity allowing it to experiment a transformation in its concrete materiality without anyone materially operating over it. This is the materiality which is represented as the purely immaterial attribute, purely social insofar as it relates one to the other, of the exchangeability of commodities.

The private and independent character with which social labor is carried out is the one which shows the specific difference which determines use values as commodities. Commodities have value, and therefore exchange value and price, because they are materializations of socially necessary abstract human labor performed in a private and independent manner. In other words, the value of commodities is the socially necessary abstract labor performed in a private and independent manner in order to produce them –that is, materialized in them- which is represented as their capacity to relate to each other as equals in exchange.[1]

[1] We can represent schematically the path followed by our analysis, allowing the unavoidable externality thus implied, in the following way (it is understood that the suffix R corresponds to 10R and the suffix S

We have thus reached the answer to why commodities have value while goods which are not products of private and independent labor do not have it. Nonetheless this answer has but put another question before us: Why is it that when the labor expended in producing a good is performed in a private and independent manner it transforms this good into a commodity and is represented as its value? If we looked at the question outside the exchange relation itself, we could also express this question as: what is the necessity resolved by the society where the products of social labor performed in a private and independent manner take the general form of commodities through this mode of production?

2.3 The form of value

If we observe the work of the cook in the restaurant at the moment he is carrying it out, all that it can corroborate is its condition of private labor. In turn, no matter how much we look at the ravioli he produces, in themselves, they are identical with those of our friend: simple use values. There is no way for them to make manifest their condition as values on their own. They

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to 1S):

	Restaurant: commodities	Friend's house: non commodities	Relative attributes
	$10\ R_c\ =\ 1\ S_c$	$10\ R_{-c}\qquad 1\ S_{-c}$	
Concerning their use value (*uv*)	$uv_{Rc} \neq uv_{Sc}$	$uv_{R-c} \neq uv_{S-c}$	$uv_{Rc} = uv_{R-c}$ $uv_{Sc} = uv_{S-c}$
Double character of the action (Exchange value: e*v*)	$a\langle \begin{matrix} a_{uvRc} \neq a_{uvSc} \\ a_{evRc} = a_{evSc} \end{matrix}$	$a\langle \begin{matrix} a_{uvR-c} \neq a_{uvS-c} \\ - \qquad - \end{matrix}$	$a_{uvRc} = a_{uvR-c}$ $a_{uvSc} = a_{uvS-c}$
Natural actions (*na*)	$na\langle \begin{matrix} na_{uvRc} \neq na_{uvSc} \\ - \qquad - \end{matrix}$	$na\langle \begin{matrix} na_{uvR-c} \neq na_{uvS-c} \\ - \qquad - \end{matrix}$	$na_{uvRc} = na_{uvR-c}$ $na_{uvSc} = na_{uvS-c}$
Human labor (*l*; concrete: *cl*; abstract: *al*)	$l\langle \begin{matrix} cl_{Rc} \neq cl_{Sc} \\ al_{Rc} = al_{Sc} \end{matrix}$	$l\langle \begin{matrix} cl_{R-c} \neq cl_{S-c} \\ al_{R-c} = al_{S-c} \end{matrix}$	$cl_{Rc} = cl_{R-c}$ $cl_{Sc} = cl_{S-c}$, but also $al_{Rc} = al_{R-c}$ $al_{Sc} = al_{S-c}$
Socially necessary labor (*sn*)	$l\langle \begin{matrix} cl_{Rc} \neq cl_{Sc} \\ snal_{Rc} = snal_{Sc} \end{matrix}$	$l\langle \begin{matrix} cl_{R-c} \neq cl_{S-c} \\ snal_{R-c} = snal_{S-c} \end{matrix}$	$snal_{Rc} = snal_{R-c}$ $snal_{Sc} = snal_{S-c}$
Socially necessary labor privately and independently performed (*pi*)	$l\langle \begin{matrix} cl_{Rc} \neq cl_{Sc} \\ snalpi_{Rc} = snalpi_{Sc} \end{matrix}$	$l\langle \begin{matrix} cl_{R-c} \neq cl_{S-c} \\ - \qquad - \end{matrix}$	

can only do it, and therefore demonstrate that the labor which produced them was socially necessary, when they are associated with another commodity by entering into an exchange relation with it. Thus, in order to carry on the investigation into the specificity of the commodity, we have no other recourse than to go back to the equality in which the value of commodities is expressed, that is, in the expression of value as exchange value. For example, 10 plates of ravioli = 1 pair of shoes; or more simply, 10R = 1S. We already know that this equality implies that both commodities contain an identical quantity of socially necessary abstract labor performed in a private and independent manner. But let us read the equality more carefully: How much are 10 plates of ravioli worth? A pair of shoes. We now notice that the equality of content contains within it a qualitative difference between the two poles of the relation. The ravioli express their value, relatively, in the shoes; the shoes do not express their own value, but their materiality is being used to express the value of the ravioli by way of being their equivalent. The value of the 10 plates of ravioli is expressed, in what? In a quantity of another use value, of shoes; in what way? By providing the evidence that they, the 10R, can equalize themselves to this thing of a different concrete materiality which is 1S, because they are materially equal to this pair of shoes as products of the socially necessary abstract labor performed in a private and independent manner, that is, as values. What 10R make manifest in being capable of entering into an exchange relation with 1S is that, they, the 10R, contain the same value as 1S, that is, 1S is their equivalent. Thus, the use value of the shoes has added a second determination: they are useful due to their materiality as shoes and they are useful because of their purely social capacity to express value.

In order for the shoes to express their value, we ought to turn the relation the opposite way. But then, the shoes would relatively express their value in the ravioli; and the latter would no longer express their value, but that of the shoes by being their equivalent. No commodity can express in itself its own value: by saying that 10 plates of ravioli are worth 10 plates of ravioli we would know nothing about their value. Moreover, outside their exchange relation with another, there is no way for a commodity to manifest its condition as value.

Let us illustrate the question with an analogy. Suppose that, in a class, we say that student A knows the same as student B, A = B. This equality relatively expresses the magnitude of the knowledge of A. It does this because it tells us that, just as B has knowledge, the knowledge of A is equal to it. It shows that A has knowledge because he or she can equalize with B as his or her "equisapient". But there is no way it can make manifest the magnitude of the knowledge of B: B may know a lot, or may know very little. Therefore, the knowledge of A can be put into a relation of equality with that of B because it has the same magnitude as the latter. But, in this relation of equality, the magnitude of the knowledge of B is not relatively expressed, since this magnitude is not manifest at all, but is expressed in the corporeal figure of student B: in this relation, the presence of B counts only as the form in which the knowledge of A is manifested.

Let us return to the question of the necessary expression of value as exchange value. The relation of exchange contains a second qualitative difference between its poles. The commodities are products of the socially necessary labor at the very moment they are produced. It is then when the labor is materialized in them, and has no way of returning to its condition as force in action. Hence, if the labor was expended in a socially useless way at that moment, that

is, if it did not produce a use value, its product lacks value from the very beginning. However, the attribute of the product as bearer or not of value can only be made manifest in the exchange itself. It does this, above all, to prove that it has it. That is, the commodity in question enters into the exchange relation to prove today that the labor expended in a private and independent manner in its production has been part of social labor at the moment of being performed. And it does this when it manages to compare itself as equal with another which acts as its equivalent, that is, when it shows that it has value because it can be put in a relation of equality with another which has it in the same magnitude. As a result, the commodity which acts as equivalent enters into the relation of exchange as an incarnation of value which possesses the attribute of proving whether the other one has it or not. In spite of being a product of a labor as private and independent as the one which produces the commodity which will relatively express its value in the exchange relation, the commodity which acts as equivalent does not enter into this relation to prove the existence of its own value, that is, its exchangeability. On the contrary, by being put in the exchange relation to play the role of a pure expression of value, it presents itself in said relation as though it was the product of the private labor which is, at the same time, the immediate representative of social labor. It presents itself, therefore, as if it was a commodity which possesses a property opposed to the condition of being a commodity itself, namely, the property of being immediately exchangeable with another.

In our example, 10R = 1S, when the shoes enter in a passive manner into the exchange relation with the ravioli, letting the latter express their value in them, they make manifest that in the production of the ravioli a labor which is useful for the consumption of the free individual who produced the shoes, so that the labor in question is confirming itself in this act as social labor, has been materialized in a private and independent manner. Through the relation 10R = 1S, the ravioli must prove that they are exchangeable with the shoes, but the shoes enter into the relation as immediately exchangeable with the ravioli. Only if the relation is inverted, 1S = 10R, are the roles inverted: now, it is the shoes which would have to prove if they contain socially necessary labor by being exchanged with the ravioli, so that these act in the relation as the immediate bearers of value.

Let us see what happens when the productive capacity of the labor which produces the commodity which relatively expresses its value changes. Let us suppose that now ½ hour of labor is required to produce 10 plates of ravioli. Their value will have reduced by half. And this is reflected in the exchange relation with the shoes, since now the same time as that materialized in one shoe instead of the pair is expended: 10R = ½ S. If, on the other hand, the productivity of the labor which produces the ravioli fell by half, 10R would contain 2 hours of labor and, therefore: 10R = 2S. Thus far, the change in the value of the ravioli is expressed unequivocally in its exchange value by shoes. But it can also occur that the productivity of the labor which produces ravioli remains constant while that of the labor which produces shoes changes. Let us suppose that the latter is doubled. Now, 10R = 2S. Conversely, if this productivity fell by half, 10R = ½ S. The expression of the value of the ravioli in shoes would change but its value would not. Let us suppose that both productivities move in equal proportion and in the same direction. The expression of value of the ravioli in shoes would remain intact, 10R = 1S, in spite of the change operated over the value of the ravioli. But if both productivities moved in opposite directions, the variation in the value of the ravioli would appear multiplied in the

expression of this value in shoes. And if the productivity of the labor which produces the ravioli and that of the one which produces the shoes changed in the same direction, but with a greater proportion in the latter than in the former, the change in the value of the ravioli would appear having the opposite sign in its expression in shoes; for example, if the productivity of the labor which produces the ravioli were doubled while that of the one which produces shoes were quadrupled, the reduction in value of the ravioli by half would be manifested as a doubling of its expression in shoes, 10R = 2S.

When observing the evolution of the expression of value in a commodity it becomes impossible to recognize in an immediate manner the changes effectively experimented in its value. This distortion has a manifestation which is of particular interest. The total value produced during a given labor time always turns out to be the same however much the productivity of labor changes. One hour of labor always yields the same quantity of value, only that this hour is prorated between a larger or smaller quantity of use values according to whether the productive capacity of labor is greater or lesser. But if there is a general tendency toward the increment of productivity which reaches both the commodity which relatively expresses its value and the one which serves as equivalent for this expression, the appearance will arise that the mass of value produced in one hour of labor tends to grow.

Now, it is obvious that the knowledge of any student is something which magnitude is, at best, truly hard to express in itself. But it is also obvious that it is not usually measured in relative terms, but through the conventional establishment of cardinal number grading systems. Confronted with the intangible nature of the magnitude of knowledge, one might say that the direct measurement of the abstract labor which produces commodities involves minor difficulties. We face, then, a new question: Why is the value of commodities only expressible in the exchange relation, that is, as exchange value, and not directly as quantities of its substance, that is, socially necessary abstract labor? In short: why can value not be measured in labor-time vouchers?

For the moment we have no other answer than to carry on. We already saw that the exchange value of a commodity is relatively expressed as a quantity of the body of another. Therefore, it is not expressed in the value of the latter, but in its materiality, that is, in the use value of it. We do not say, 10 plates of ravioli are worth the value of a pair of shoes, but 10 plates of ravioli are worth a pair of shoes. Hence, from the point of view of the commodity which occupies the pole of equivalent in the exchange relation, use value acts as expression of value. The pair of shoes can express the value of the ravioli because they are themselves a value, that is, the product of abstract labor. But it can only do this by having a different concrete materiality to that of the ravioli. If, as use values, the shoes were equal to the ravioli, they would fall in the impossibility of any commodity to express its value in quantities of its own body; i.e., in the impossibility that the equality 10R = 10R has no way of making manifest the value of the ravioli. The shoes can only express the value of the ravioli because they are use values different from them and, therefore, products of a different concrete labor from the one materialized in them. What stands out in the pole of the equivalent is not the abstract character of the labor which has produced it as value, that is, the one which allows it to enter into the exchange relation, but the concrete character of the labor which has produced it as use value. Thus, the concrete labor which has produced the equivalent appears as the one which has granted it its

capacity to represent value. Finally, value is the product of socially necessary labor, and it is due to its condition as product of this labor that the pair of shoes can express the value of the ravioli. But in this expression it always intervenes through its use value produced by a definite concrete labor. And it does not have these attributes as product of a directly social labor but, on the contrary, as product of labor performed in an independent and private manner. To sum up, from the point of view of the pole of the equivalent, use value appears as representative of value, concrete labor as the representative of abstract labor and private labor as representative of social labor. The fact that a commodity is put in the exchange relation as the equivalent of another for which it serves as expression of value, makes the commodity in question appear in an immediate manner as concrete materialization of social labor performed privately.

These appearances are manifested already in the simple, isolated or circumstantial expression of the value of a commodity in the body of another. But, since this is a simple relation of equality, nothing restricts the extension of the relative expression of the value of a commodity to the universe of commodities which cohabitate with it in the process of exchange, that is, in circulation. The unfurling of the relative expression of value of the plates of ravioli results in:

10 plates of ravioli = 1 pair of shoes
10 plates of ravioli = 5 faucets
10 plates of ravioli = 1 chair
10 plates of ravioli = 8 haircuts
10 plates of ravioli = 1/5 pound of gold
…and so on until spanning the universality of the rest of the commodities.

In this unfurling, the private labor which produces the ravioli makes manifest its condition as social labor in the fact that its product relates, not only with the product of another private labor which officiates in a circumstantial and isolated way as representative of social labor, but with the social universality of the products of private labors. The private labor which produces ravioli thus manifests itself, in a late and indirect way, as a labor of the same nature as that of the rest of useful labors that are realized in society in a private and independent manner, that is, as a labor as social as them. Each one of the other commodities now appears as an especial equivalent of the ravioli.

If the developed relative expression of the value of a commodity is inverted, this appears as the general equivalent which serves to relatively express the value of the world of commodities:

1 pair of shoes = 10 plates of ravioli
5 faucets = 10 plates of ravioli
1 chair = 10 plates of ravioli
8 haircuts = 10 plates of ravioli
1/5 pound of gold = 10 plates of ravioli
etc.

The ravioli appear in this relation as a material object which possesses use value, product of a given concrete labor, performed in a private and independent manner which, nonetheless, in its function as general equivalent, represents the social labor materialized in a private and independent manner in all the other commodities. Therefore, the ravioli are

presented in this relation as having the property of being immediately exchangeable by all the other commodities in their quality of immediate incarnation of the socially necessary abstract labor expended in producing them. Only when they exchange their commodities by them, are the commodity producers able to recognize immediately the social character of the labor that each one has performed privately and independently. Evidently, in the real world, the ravioli are far from occupying such position, however tasty they may be and however disagreeable their cooks may find this. However, there is indeed a commodity which has historically occupied this place: gold. In reality, the relative expression of the universe of commodities has the form of:

1 pair of shoes = 1/5 pound of gold
5 faucets = 1/5 pound of gold
1 chair = 1/5 pound of gold
8 haircuts = 1/5 pound of gold
10 plates of ravioli = 1/5 pound of gold
etc.

Consolidated as representative of the value of the world of commodities, gold acts as money. Up to here we have accepted the inbuilt ambiguity of political economy between exchange value and price. But here we need to clearly distinguish them. Exchange value is the expression of the value of a commodity in quantities of any other; price is the expression of the value of any commodity expressed in quantities of money.

When a commodity -in the concrete historical development, gold- consolidates in the function of money and, therefore, is socially recognized as an immediately exchangeable object by any other product of social labor performed privately, it accomplishes something which we saw at the beginning was impossible for any commodity: it expresses value even when it is not in any exchange relation with another commodity. It has become substantivized value, in the general representative of social wealth produced under the form of commodities. It is clear, however, that it is still impossible for it to express the magnitude of its own value by itself. Money can only express the magnitude of its value by entering into the exchange relation with another commodity which operates as its equivalent. But when it does this in a simple manner with a definite commodity, it does not conserve in this relation the evidence of its condition as money. It only does it under the unfurled relative form of its value, where each one of the other commodities is presented as a special equivalent of it equally with the others.

In being exchanged by money, commodities make manifest that they are the product of a portion of social labor expended in a useful way for social consumption. Here, the money of the buyer acts as representative of the social necessity for the use value produced by the seller. But, if the money of the buyer embodies the social necessity, it does this precisely due to the condition of free individual, and therefore, private and independent as regards labor, of its possessor. Thus, the latter acts in turn as incarnation of the social necessity on his or her own account and at his or her own risk. If the commodity he or she has bought ends up having no use value afterward, he or she will have expended the product of his or her own social labor performed privately and independently in vain in buying it. Through the transformation of commodities into money and of money into commodities, that is, in the process of buying and selling which is realized in the market, the general unity of social production and consumption

between private and independent producers is established.

2.4 The unity of the process of social metabolism established through the form of value of the product of social labor performed in a private manner

Like any living existence, human life is a process of metabolism in which the subject expends a portion of their own body to appropriate their medium, thus reproducing themselves as living subjects. In the generality of animal species, the energy expended by the subject at the expense of their body to appropriate their medium commonly results in the reproduction of the body of the subject itself. The labor which they perform, in the most generic sense of energy expenditure directed toward a goal, immediately throws into relief the appropriation of the means of life. So the animal can only realize this appropriation of its means of life if it finds them within their reach in nature. The general way in which it can amplify this reach is the mutation of its own body, in such a way as to multiply its potentialities with respect to its natural medium. This is why the inherent necessity of all living beings to expand their capacity to appropriate the medium is only openly manifested when faced with critical changes in it, under the appearance that this pertains to a necessity which can only be initiated by responding to an exterior stimulus, that is, as the necessity to adapt to the medium.

As expression of the necessity of multiplying the body's capacity to reproduce it, the process of animal metabolism takes a complex form. The subject starts by expending a limited portion of their body to appropriate the potentiality which their action has with respect to the potentiality of the medium, and only if this limited expenditure recognizes in the medium a means apt for the reproduction of the body in its unity, does the process of fully appropriating the medium trigger off. The action of appropriating the medium is thus developed in two moments: it starts with the knowledge of the potentiality of the subject's own action with respect to that of the medium, to culminate with the effective appropriation of the latter. The first moment, the action of virtually appropriating the medium, that is, the action of knowing themselves as subject with respect to the medium, is but the action of organizing the action of effectively appropriating the latter. The process of knowledge is the action of organizing one's own action.

This is what the amoeba does when it extends a pseudopod. It expends only a portion of its body touching a medium which, if it destroys this portion, makes it retract. Conversely, if the medium allows it to reproduce this portion of its body, it throws the whole of it to incorporate it to itself. Of course, the process of organizing the action advances in the complexity of its forms, to the extent that the reach which the potentiality of the living subject has with respect to its medium develops.

The human being generically differentiates itself from the animal species by the potentiality that it has to expand the appropriation of its medium, not simply springing from its own body, but expanding its capacity to act over natural objects with the end of transforming them into means for this same action and, by upholding this action in them, produce means for the reproduction of human life. In short, the human being is distinct as a genus of the animal species by its capacity to appropriate its medium through the labor which produces use values.

This peculiar form which has the moment of the process of metabolism in which the

body is expended to transform the medium into a means for itself, gives a form to the portion of the expenditure applied to organize the unity of the action which is also peculiar. At first, the human life process hardly differentiates itself from that of superior mammals. Thus, just to take a very schematic example, the future human being starts by differentiating itself from bovines in the production of its life only by the fact that it grabs the grass from the ground with the hands instead of the tongue. The organization of its action goes no further than knowing if the strength of its arm is sufficient and if that in front of it is edible or not. But as soon as it affirms itself as human, using a little stone to cut the grass, he or she needs to organize the action of taking the stone knowing the mediate potentiality which it has with respect to the reproduction of their own body; that is, they need to know that the result of the action of taking a stone is that they will eat grass. If they now multiply the capacity to reproduce themselves by taking the stone, which they will not utilize to cut the grass but to sharpen the stone effectively destined for this end, the reach of the knowledge of the potentiality of their action will have taken a step further. If this whole process is carried out during summer in order to have the grass at their disposal during winter, when it does not exist in the natural medium, then its organization implies that the individual needs to know that when it picks up the stone before the summer, what they are doing is initiating their process of eating grass in the winter. Not to mention that, when they need to know that the potentiality of their action is that in the moment of picking up the stone, what they are doing is initiating the process in which another individual different from them will eat grass during winter.

The development of the human capacity to transform the medium into a means for itself takes shape in the increasing instrumental, spatial, temporal and personal separation between the action which opens a cycle of metabolism and the result which closes it reproducing the human subject. It thus reaches a point where the knowledge of the potentiality itself with respect to the potentiality of the medium can only realize itself as a process which knows itself in its own potentiality. That is to say, as a process of knowledge which recognizes itself as such, a process whose subjects know themselves as individuals who have knowledge. The process of productive expenditure of a portion of the body to organize the labor which opens human metabolism thus takes the shape which is generically its own: conscious knowing, that is, consciousness. And consciousness opens up the full productive expenditure of the body because it knows the end of this action, that is, it takes the form of will. From this moment onwards, human labor becomes a conscious and willful action, an action which knows its own necessity, its determinations, and which unfolds itself because it knows what the end it will attain is.

Now, the human potential to expand its appropriation of the medium no longer simply differs from that of animal species in general by being realized through transforming the medium through labor. Nor is the difference simply a matter of degree compared to animal species that act by transforming their medium. As a product of its own development, the human species comes to distinguish itself from animal species because its labor, and therefore its very process of metabolism, is an action governed consciously and voluntarily.

The natural history of human life is the history of the development of the productive potentialities of labor and, therefore, of the development of the modes in which the latter is organized, that is, of the development of consciousness and will. It is only through this

development that the human being is able to mutate its own body. The clearest manifestation of this is the increase in volume of the natural organ which rules in a conscious and willful manner the application of the human force of labor –the cerebral cortex- with the expansion of the reach of this application. Given that each human generation provides the next one with a world which it has transformed in a conscious and willful manner, we can say that the human being is a historical subject, that it has a history, in contrast with the simple progression of the animal species.

Above all, labor is a process of an individual character: there is no way to work if one's own body is not expended in the process. Therefore, the productive potencies of labor are realized as an attribute of individual labor: the fact that a producer may be more or less skilled, more or less fast, etc. is borne in his or her individual productive subjectivity. But these productive forces of labor do not spring from the abstract individuality of those who work, on the contrary, each individual bears in his or her body, in his or her individual productive subjectivity, productive forces which have reached him or her by the action of the labor of others. Therefore, what they bear in their individuality are the productive forces of social labor. That is, the productive potencies of individual labor are, above all, productive potencies of social labor. For example, the production of a scientific book is the result of the individual labor of its author. The rigor of the investigation, the plasticity of exposition, etc. are mediated by the productive attributes of its author. But the latter can realize their individual labor because they are bearers of a knowledge produced by the mass of social labor which has produced and reproduced them as bearers of such individual capacity to perform labor. Moreover, the author can carry out his investigation because he or she has eaten, dressed, transported to the workplace, etc., thanks to the product of the labor of a multitude of individuals which have produced for him or her the respective use values. The productive potencies of individual labor spring from and are sustained by the labor which they have performed for the author, from his or her predecessors to colleagues, dead or alive, to the last individual who has produced a use value which directly or indirectly has entered into his or her individual and productive consumption, and even further back (for example, the one who has produced the means of transport which he or she utilized to get to the workplace). At the same time, his or her cooperation with other individuals in the same labor process, the realization of an immediately collective labor, multiplies the productive potencies beyond the reach of his or her isolated individual labor. This means that the individual labor of the author is but an organic portion which integrates a process of general productive cooperation. The productive forces of his or her individual labor are productive of his or her social labor. In synthesis, labor is always an activity which contains this double determination: it is a productive expenditure of an individual body which realizes the productive potencies distinctive of the social character of labor.[2]

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[2] Indeed, there are certain animal species whose life processes attain the form of truly complex processes of social metabolism, where the expenditure of a body of an individual at a determinate moment serves for the reproduction of another at a distant moment in time. For example, a leafcutter ant also cuts grass in summer, in a collectively organized activity, so that others may cultivate fungi which will serve as nourishment for more members of their same community in winter. But, in the complexity of this process of metabolism, the productive potencies of what we may for simplicity call social labor are sustained in

The second moment of the process of human metabolism is that of consumption. The mere fact that labor is an individual process in its concrete form makes it evident that the consumption of means of production, that is, productive consumption, is in an immediate manner an individual process. But, so soon as the means of production of one are the product of the labor of others and, in turn, their consumer produces for others, that individual productive consumption is then socially determined. In turn, the moment in which the cycle of human metabolism closes, the consumption of means for subsistence, that is, the consumption which reproduces the body of the subject, is necessarily an individual process. This is a necessarily individual process by its very object, so much so that we can contrast it as a pure individual consumption with respect to the productive consumption of the means of production, the result of which is an existence exterior to the person who performs it. There is no way to consume means of subsistence without an individual intervention in the process of such consumption: no individual may nourish themselves because another individual consumes food. However, given that individual consumption nourishes itself from the products of social labor and that, at the same time, reproduces its subject as individual bearer of the productive forces of society, such consumption is determined as the concrete form of an organic necessity which transcends any abstract individuality. The consumption of each is determined by the consumption needs of others. Consumption is always an individual activity which potencies are socially determined.

Insofar as the process of human life is realized upon a purely natural basis, the process of human metabolism does not differentiate itself from that of any animal species. For example, when an individual breaths ambient air, their breathing is simply an animal breathing: they realize an expenditure of their body -which does not require being ruled in a conscious and willful manner- having the reproduction of such expenditure as its immediate result. Likewise, if an individual walks bare-footed over virgin lands, their walking is simply an animal walking. Only when it is sustained by the consumption of the products of labor, is the process of human metabolism constituted as such. When an asthmatic breaths thanks to their medication, or when anyone breaths heated, cooled, etc. air –all consumptions which are mediated by a multitude of conscious and willful productive actions- their breathing differentiates itself generically from

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the extreme mutilation of the individual productive attributes: the very body of each individual is biologically determined to accomplish a specialized partial task. Contrary to this, the process of human social metabolism owes its generic potency to the fact that the development of the social productive forces is borne by the development of the individual productive subjectivities. The emergence and development of consciousness and will are but the full concrete form of this generic potency: they are the ones in which the capacity to organize the process of social metabolism is a constitutive attribute of the individual productive subjectivities. This is why the development of the productive forces of social labor can only reach a historically limited extent when it is realized by concrete forms based on the mutilation of the individual subjectivity of those who perform the direct labor whereby their consciousness and will are stripped of the exercise of its social organization, as it happens in the slave mode of production. This is also why those who yearn for a stratified organization of social labor based on the attribution of a natural differentiation in the subjectivities of each individual praise the brain of the ant. But the naturalization of human social organization reaches universal diffusion, under an absolutely innocent appearance, in the inversion of the direct personal relations which rule those societies as an attribute of the different functions which the biologically specialized bodies of the ants carry out in the unity of their simply natural process of metabolism: queen, drone, soldier, worker.

animal breathing. In the same way, when an individual walks wearing shoes, their walking distinguishes itself generically from animal walking.

Therefore, when an individual works producing their own shoes, they are producing themselves as human beings. But when they produce shoes for the consumption of others, when they perform a socially useful labor, what they do is produce the material condition for other human beings to realize their process of metabolism as such; so that the product of their labor is not simply shoes, not simply useful things, but other human beings. To the extent that the human metabolic process opens with an expenditure of the body of an individual in the labor process, to close with the reproduction of another individual through the consumption of use values directly or indirectly produced by the former, the process of human metabolism is determined as a process of social metabolism. And it is also so determined insofar as the two extremes of this process are mediated because an individual productively consumes for their own labor the product of the labor of another individual.

Taking the process of human metabolism in its social unity, we see that consciousness and will are attributes borne by each individual productive subjectivity. But they are not simply the forms in which each one organizes their abstractly individual labor process, but the forms in which the social character of the process of human metabolism is organized. Consciousness and will are the forms of human action which bear the organization of the process of social metabolism. They are the actions through which each individual recognizes himself or herself, and acts, as individual bearer of the productive forces of the labor of society. They are the bearers of the specifically human relations by which the process of social metabolism is ruled. They are, therefore, the bearers of the relations which rule the natural process of human metabolism in a way which is generically theirs. We succinctly recognize such relations in their own generic determination, differentiating them from any other form of natural relation, by the name of social relations.

The first question which must be resolved by any human society to reproduce its life, is the way in which it will assign the total labor capacity which it has available in order to carry out its process of social metabolism, with the end of applying it under the different concrete forms of useful labor to be performed individually by its members. Let us suppose a social unit formed by a group of friends who decide to eat a barbeque. First of all, it has to be prepared. In order to do this, this society counts with a certain quantity of total labor power, depending on the number of its members and the amount of time each is willing to dedicate. In function of such availability, the society assigns each of its members the portion of total labor that they are to perform: one will buy the meat, another the vegetables, the wine, prepare the fire, cook, etc. Thus, they will have assigned their total force of social labor to the different individual concrete useful labors. They will have done this on the basis of the direct personal relation which united all the members, their bond of friendship; a bond through which the consciousness and will of each one recognizes the others as a member of their community of friends. And it would be perfectly possible that, due to this very bond, the members of the society agreed that one of them, who usually dislikes working in groups, be released of performing his part: "what are friends for?" In such situation, this society would put into action a lesser total capacity of labor than that which it would potentially have available. Once social labor is realized through the different individual concrete labors, this society would be in conditions to carry out its second

step in its process of metabolism, the individual consumption of the use values which have been produced. The allocation of the social product to the different individual members is ruled by the direct relation of friendship. This relation may perfectly express itself, for example, in that the friend who goes by the nickname "fat" is given a double ration of meat. Again, "what are friends for?" Thus, our little society of friends will have given another step forward in the reproduction of its life.

Let us now leave behind the abstract simplicity of the above example and confront the situation in the complexity of the historical development of humanity. In the most primitive modes of production, the allocation of the total capacity for labor of society under the different concrete useful forms of labor to be carried out by each individual is resolved through relations of personal interdependence established inside of each community, upon a simple animal basis in the beginning. In societies with a slavery system, the problem is resolved by the direct relation of personal subordination of the slaves under the master. Through it, the latter commands the former to perform the concrete labors which correspond to each of them; or delegates his personal authority to a slave or group of slaves who impose this allocation in the master's name. The consciousness of the slaves recognizes in the person of the master, even if only by the force of the stick, the sovereignty of organizing their social labor, to which they must submit their will. In a feudal society based on a tribute in kind, the serfs assign their capacity to perform labor in order to reproduce their life and provide use values which constitute the tribute to the lord of whom they are subjects by the direct personal relations of vassalage, the exercise of which is, again, based on the stick. In each of these societies, the social relations of interdependence and subordination are manifested as naturally inherent attributes of the persons involved in them. Lords are who they are by the grace of God, just as the serfs are who they are by a similar disgrace.

But let us focus on the capitalist mode of organizing social production, where commodity producers prevail. They are such, precisely, by having plain command over their respective individual labor processes and, therefore, by realizing individually their respective portions of social labor in a private and independent manner one from the other. As such mutually independent individuals, they lack any direct personal relation which rules the social organization of their labor. They are free individuals, in the sense that their consciousness and will are not subjected to those of any other individual by relations of personal dependence, be they willful or forced upon them, in the organization of their individual labor for those others. Reciprocally, no one can impose their consciousness and will upon others in the process in which they organize their individual labor for others. Therefore, at the very moment in which each one must work for the consumption of others, they confront the problem of how to organize this social labor without having any other social relation between them than being, each one of them, an individual bearer of a portion of the total capacity to perform the general labor of society, that is, to expend the materiality of their body under a concrete form whatever this is- which produces a value of social use, to perform abstract labor. What do they do, then?

Each one applies their aliquot part of the capacity to perform social labor in general, productively expending their individual body, that is, their muscles, brains, etc., under a concrete form determined by what their consciousness as a free individual tells them will result in a value of social use for others. But none of them have a way of imposing this condition on

the consciousness and will of the rest. On the contrary, it is the private consciousness and will of those others which has the authority of resolving which of the things each one has privately produced they (the others) will consume and, therefore, will recognize as part of the social product, as values of social use. If at the moment of performing their labor, each one acted affirming themselves in their liberty with respect to the other one for whom they worked; now each one acts affirming themselves in their liberty with respect to the other one who worked for them. The question, then, concerns the sovereignty that others have of recognizing the social character of the labor performed by each one, not in the effective moment of that performance where each one acted in a private and independent manner with respect to the others, but once said labor has already been materialized in its product. But this concerns a personal sovereignty that each one can exercise with respect to the product of the other only if, in turn, the other exercises theirs with respect to the product of each one. Therefore, it concerns a personal sovereignty that each one indirectly has over the other which, at the same time, is no personal sovereignty over the other. The social relation of the commodity producers has no way of assuming the concrete shape of a direct personal sovereignty at the moment in which each one privately performs their social labor, and it still cannot do it at the moment in which each one privately recognizes the social character of the labor performed for them. The unity of these two moments thus takes the concrete form of an indirect social relation between persons which is borne as the sovereignty which the products of social labor performed privately and independently have to exchange one with the other.

If the product of a private labor is capable of being exchanged for that of another, it will have confirmed its condition of being the materialization of social labor as the use value for the consumption of someone other than its producer. Once a value of social use has been produced through the private and independent expenditure under a concrete form which is adequate to the corresponding portion of the total capacity of society to perform general human labor, then value will have been produced. That is, a use value which has a social aptitude for exchange will have been produced. And this aptitude will become manifest as the capacity of a commodity to enter the exchange relation with another in the proportion which corresponds to their reciprocal condition as materialization of the same quantity of abstract labor, that is, as exchange value. If that product is incapable of attracting another one, it will have demonstrated by this that the portion of the capacity of general social labor applied to its production has been expended in a socially useless manner. It will not have produced a social use value nor, therefore, value.

The socially necessary abstract labor expended to produce a commodity is represented as the aptitude it has to relate to another in exchange, that is, as its value, because this exchangeability is the indirect form in which the unity of social production whose organization is ruled in a private and independent manner is imposed. The form of value which commodities have is the general social relation that their private and independent producers indirectly establish among themselves. In other words, the commodity is the general materialized social relation which rules production –and, therefore, consumption- in the society in which social labor is realized in a private and independent manner. This is the way in which this society resolves the allocation of its total capacity to perform labor under different useful concrete forms which is carried out by each of its members and, therefore, the unity between the

productive forces which are characteristic of each individual and their determination as social productive forces, between the individual materiality of consumption and its determination as concrete form of the process of social reproduction, between social production and consumption. In sum, the exchange of commodities, that is, the market, is the mode in which free individuals resolve the unity of the organization of their process of social metabolism through giving their general social relation the indirect form of a relation between things.

The little society we formed with that friend of ours who cooked the ravioli for us, by contrast, resolved the same problem based on the personal relation which unites us. It was on this basis that our friend applied his portion of the total capacity to perform labor for that small specific society so as to produce individually a directly social use value. By the same reason, the labor performed at home for the rest of the members of a family does not produce value nor does it have any way to do it. It concerns the portion of the total capacity to perform labor of the social family nucleus, borne by the individual productive subjectivity of one of its members, which is assigned under determinate concrete forms ruled by personal relations of dependence which define the family as such. Its product can only be consumed by those who have this personal relation as their own personal attribute. Insofar as the member in question works for themselves, that is, expends their body producing a use value for their own consumption, they perform simple individual labor. When they expend their body producing a use value which will restore the body of their relatives, they perform social labor. But they do not perform it in a private and independent manner with respect to them, but in a directly social manner.

The fact that in the capitalist mode of production the unity of social labor is established a posteriori to the realization of this labor implies that it is a mode of organization of the process of social metabolism which, whatever the productive potencies it may have, carries within itself the waste of a part of the expenditure of labor power performed by society. What in other modes of organizing the expenditure of social labor constitutes an abnormality, an accident, namely, that the social forces to perform labor be applied without this resulting in the production of a social use value, here becomes the necessary expression of the normal movement of the process of social metabolism. Therefore, the capitalist mode of production carries within itself, right from the start, a specific limitation to the historical development of productive potencies of labor.

By discovering what the society of free individuals performs through the representation of socially necessary abstract labor effected in a private and independent manner as the value of commodities, we have discovered why the value of a commodity cannot express itself directly as quantities of its substance, but as quantities of the body of another commodity, that is, as exchange value. In order that the value of commodities could express itself in hours of labor, a social agreement or social authority would have to exist so that it would validate the time of socially necessary labor to produce each commodity. Concomitantly, this agreement or authority would have to establish the condition of each product as a social use value, both with respect to its qualitative attributes and the quantity to be produced. The establishment of the above determinations implies the establishment of the technical conditions in which each commodity will be produced. Hence, in order that this same agreement or authority could effectively rule the labor time and the quantity to be produced, it would have the sovereignty of allocating the correspondingly necessary means of production for each producer. But social

labor produces commodities when it is performed in a private and independent manner, that is, when there is no direct social relation which rules it. In order that value be expressed in quantities of its substance, in time units of labor, commodities would have to be the product of a labor ruled in a directly social manner. But then, the problem that the form of the commodity was to resolve would already be resolved. That is, the total capacity to perform labor of society would have already been assigned under the different useful concrete forms of it. Therefore, this would be a directly social labor and not a social labor performed privately and independently. In reality, it would be an absurd contradiction in terms which would make value redundant. Only the socially useful labor which is performed in a private and independent manner can produce value, and the latter can only be expressed in the exchange relation of a commodity with another. The socially useful labor performed in a directly social manner simply produces use values, and has no way of being represented as an aptitude for exchange.

We have thus that, in the mode of capitalist production, the materiality of abstract human labor, which has been objectified in its product under a socially useful concrete form by labor organized in a private and independent manner, acquires the historically specific qualitative determination of being represented, with a purely social materiality, as the value of said product. It is through this representation that the unity of production with social consumption is imposed, after the fact, following production. Let us now return to the quantitative determination of this quality.

2.5 On the quantitative determinations of socially necessary abstract labor and its representation as the substance of value

First of all, the amount of abstract labor embodied in a certain quantity of a given object is an amount of generically human productive energy that has passed from the worker's body into the materiality of the object. But the value of the commodity is not the mere social representation of abstract human labor, but of the socially necessary abstract human labor materialized in it. And it is precisely this condition of being socially necessary that is mediated by the private form in which the social labor producing commodities is materialized. Just as the social character of the labor embodied in a commodity can only be revealed when it enters into an exchange relationship with another, the amount of value-substance contained in it can only be revealed as exchange value; that is, as the amount of the other's body acting as an equivalent. Therefore, there is no way to directly measure the amount of socially necessary abstract labor embodied privately in any commodity. However, now that we have unfolded the concrete determination of the commodity as the bearer of the objectified general social relation, we are in a position to return to the qualitative determinations of that labor and their quantitative expression, which until now we had only been able to confront in the course leading to the analytical discovery of the substance of value.

The complexity of specific forms that human productive energy expenditure takes does not allow the analysis to confront its quality as a mass of abstract labor directly, under an expression that immediately reveals the magnitude of that mass. Consequently, one can only

analyze the role its quantity plays in determining the exchangeability of commodities by referring to the expression of that quantity through a measure external to the content of the productive energy expenditure itself. This measure, which corresponds to the one used in practice to estimate labor quantities, is the time required to perform that work. The first quantitative expression that analysis faces as a quality determining commodities as exchangeable objects is the equalization of abstract labor times applied to the production of each commodity. However, given the externality relative to the labor expenditure itself implied in measuring it by its duration, within this measurement lies the possibility of a qualitative difference that affects the magnitude of the labor embodied in the commodities. This is the difference in the intensity with which the body's productive effort has been applied over the temporal span of that effort. By its very nature, labor intensity is a qualitative determination whose quantitative discrepancy involves not only the individual labors producing the same use-value but the totality of individual labors. Moreover, given a certain labor intensity, the productive capacity or productivity of labor measures the relationship between the number of units of a particular use-value and the amount of labor applied in their production. Consequently, this relationship depends on the production technique used. Reduced to unit terms, it represents the labor time required to produce one unit of the same use-value. Thus, the quantitative discrepancy in labor productivity, considered in itself, involves only the individual labors that produce the same use-value.

Based on what has been seen so far, both intensity and productivity result from purely technical determinations. But, as we have just emphasized, in the capitalist mode of production the concrete determination of the intensity and productivity of labor as socially necessary is mediated by the private form in which social labor is organized. Consequently, this determination cannot be resolved by the simple direct imposition of a rule. On the contrary, in this mode of production, the unity of the social metabolic process is imposed indirectly through the apparently independent movements of its individual organs, in the form of their convergence toward normality. That is, toward an allocation of the tangible material of social labor and its product to each individual organ of the social metabolic process, determined autonomously by the reproduction of those organs and processes as if constituting an immediate unity that, at the same time, can only be realized in the form of a constant deviation from that immediacy.

Under these conditions, normality has as its simplest synthetic quantitative expression the average of the multiplicity of individual conditions. Hence, the determination of the labor applied to the production of each type of commodity as socially necessary results from the weighted average of the labor time applied to the production of each type of commodity by all of its private producers, mediated by the average intensity of the labor applied in that same production relative to the average intensity of the labor applied across the entirety of social labor.

From the point of view of this impersonal way of assigning the total societal labor to work, each individual producer carries within themselves an aliquot portion, and as such, an average, of that labor. On this basis, the intensity of work is expressed inversely in the duration of the working time over which each producer can deploy their individual capacity to work. As a result, in sectors where the materiality of labor necessarily requires the application of an

intensity higher than the normal average, the producer will exhaust their personal average share of labor force by applying it during a correspondingly shorter working time. In its own autonomous movement, the reproduction of the social metabolism process will impose its normality through the practical recognition that the amount of abstract labor materialized in the product of the sectors in question is greater than that which results from the simple time spent. And the same occurs, inversely, in sectors whose material conditions require the application of labor with an intensity lower than normal.

Then, the effect of differences in the intensity of labor on the determination of socially necessary abstract labor time among commodity producers within each branch of social production is subtracted. If any of them applied their labor power with an intensity higher than normal, since this more intense exertion would deplete their labor power in a correspondingly accelerated manner, they would produce in each working day an amount of use-values equal to that of those who used the same technique and worked at normal intensity. Consequently, the normal reproduction of their condition as an individual organ of the social life process will correspond to the determination of socially necessary abstract labor time embodied by the latter in their commodities.

From the point of view of the indirect unity between social production and social consumption, the determination as socially necessary for the production of a certain class of commodity to the weighted average of abstract labor time privately applied by its producers implies that they, as a whole, have contributed a mass of abstract labor to satisfy the need that other members of society have for the use value in question, which gives them the right to dispose of the product of an equivalent mass of someone else's abstract labor applied in the concrete forms that satisfy their own needs.

It is clear that, within the group of producers of the same commodity, the normality expressed in the weighted average encompasses the differentiation inherent in the private character of the social labor performed. The producer who has applied a labor productivity above the average is recognized, as socially necessary abstract labor embodied in their commodities, a greater amount than the abstract labor they have actually embodied in them. Consequently, this producer can have at their disposal a mass of use-values produced by other members of society in sectors different from their own, which embodies a greater amount of abstract labor than they have effectively embodied in the mass of use-values they provide to those other members. Someone who has worked with a productivity below the average of their sector finds themselves in the opposite situation, since they have materially expended more abstract labor than what is recognized as socially useful through the value of their commodity.

The relationship between the material expenditure of abstract labor performed individually, its recognition as socially necessary in the form of the average of its sector, and, consequently, the source of the individual capacity to dispose of the use-values produced in other sectors, becomes evident when each producer is recognized in their concrete determination as an organ of their sector. Conversely, the whole relationship appears inverted if one isolates the abstract labor materialized with productivity above the sector average and considers it independently in itself. When isolated this way, this labor appears enhanced in its capacity to produce value, that is, as if it were by itself an extraordinary capacity to produce value. However, in its concrete determination, its condition of being enhanced is the inverse

expression of the condition of being diminished, so to speak, that applies to abstract labor performed with productivity below the average. Abstract labor performed with productivity above the sector average owes the claims it grants over the product of social labor in excess of those corresponding to its material magnitude, not to the absolute power of its own productivity, but to the fact that it coexists in the same sector with expenditures of abstract labor materialized with productivity lower than its own. Moreover, the abstraction of enhanced labor can give rise to the inverted appearance that value does not arise from the socially necessary abstract labor applied to the production of a commodity, but from the economy in the application of that labor. And from here, it may give rise to the inverted appearance that the greater mass of value produced by a sector as a result of a higher participation of low-productivity producers does not come from the resulting lower average productivity, but from the greater power to produce value achieved by the high-relative-productivity capitals. No matter how much abstract labor materialized with productivity above the average has the potential to represent itself as a greater magnitude of value, it does not in itself constitute the source of this greater magnitude. On the contrary, the greater the weight of this labor within its sector, given the same quantity of use-values produced, the smaller is the substance of value carried in them.

To avoid possible misunderstandings, we must keep in mind that here we are just beginning to confront the determination of socially necessary abstract labor through its normalcy, with the effect of dispersion within this normalcy, and with its simplest quantitative expression as an average. But even at this stage of the development of our understanding of this concrete reality, it is necessary to point out that such an average does not imply that participation in the determination of normalcy lacks specific material limits. Belonging to it assumes that each of the commodity producers who are part of it, regardless of the degree of deviation of their individual productivity from the branch average, is in a position to reproduce themselves in an equally normal way—that is, normally restoring the value of their means of production and their own capacity to work again—by selling at the value corresponding to the average productivity. The possibility that there are producers within a branch who operate with productive capacities sufficiently far from the prevailing normalcy, either upward or downward, so that in the first case they advance by displacing others, and in the second, they are displaced because they cannot reproduce themselves, confronts us with the concrete forms of the movement of normalcy over time. Determinations of this movement, however, we are not yet facing at this point.

The socially necessary abstract labor embodied in commodities, which is represented as their value, contains a second determination as an expression of the unity of the concrete allocation of social production and consumption in a private and independent manner. Let us begin by recalling that labor is a productive expenditure of the body of the person performing it. In turn, the individual expenditure of the body applied to the development of one's own capacity to work, that is, to develop one's own labor power, is primarily a consumptive expenditure. Once the specificity of human labor is recognized as expenditure governed consciously and voluntarily, we differentiate between simple consumptive expenditure, governed in a merely animal way, and consumptive labor, governed in a conscious and voluntary way. As soon as this consumptive labor has the immediate purpose of developing the

productive attributes of the individual with the indirect purpose of performing productive labor for others, socially productive labor, the organization of this social character is governed by the respective mode of production. That is, the allocation of the corresponding portion of society's potential labor power to the individual who is going to expend it under the socially determined concrete form of performing their consumptive labor in order to finally produce use-values for others is governed by the prevailing general social relation.

In modes of production where this relationship takes shape in the direct allocation of productive and consumptive labor to each individual according to their personal dependency links, the performance of the consumptive labor in question appears as the development of an attribute inherent to the person performing it. But in a mode of production lacking personal dependency links, such allocation necessarily takes form through the indirect relationship established via the attribute of exchangeability of the products of social labor materialized privately and independently. Now, while the consumptive labor in question constitutes a need of a common and general nature, its performance reaches indiscriminately the universe of individual subjects of social production. All individual producers face equally the necessity of performing that consumptive labor to the same extent, as a condition to be able to produce and reproduce themselves as such producers. Therefore, its allocation under the concrete forms that sustain the production of all types of commodities is indiscriminately implicit for the performance of labor applied directly to the production of the commodities themselves. Under these conditions, any amount of abstract labor expended productively implies the same proportion of abstract labor expended consumptively to sustain it, regardless of the concrete form in which the former is performed. Thus, the allocation of the latter to each individual who performs it privately and independently does not need to present itself as an addition in the determination of the value of the commodities they produce. Its universal presence in the same proportion neutralizes it with respect to the determination of that value, regardless of the commodity whose production had it as a condition. Hence, productive labor is the only one that needs to be allocated to the different private and independent producers through the production of value and therefore, it presents itself as merely productive labor and, from there, as simple labor.

The issue changes when the individual producer must perform an additional specific application of consumptive labor, beyond the common one, to acquire and maintain the capacity to produce a certain social use value. Now, the allocation of this realization to the specific individual producer needs to be properly reflected in the general objectified social relation. Therefore, the materialization of the specifically extended portion of abstract consumptive labor in the very person of the individual producer who had to perform it in order to be able to produce the commodity that requires it needs to be recognized as an additional materialization of socially necessary abstract labor carried out privately and independently to produce it. Consequently, the socially necessary abstract labor materialized in the commodity in question is determined as complex socially necessary labor and, as such, constitutes the substance of the value of that commodity.

Finally, let us stop at a third determination of the value of commodities. Whatever the historically specific form in which the organization of each cycle of social production takes place, it contains the assignment, to each productive member of society, of the concrete labor

useful to others to which they will apply their labor power as an individual organ of the process of social metabolism. That is, it involves organizing the concrete materiality of social labor that is going to be put into action, and which will therefore be alive, during the production cycle in question. The private organization of social labor is characterized by the absence of an immediate unity between the material forms in which living labor is privately applied and the material forms corresponding to its application as socially useful. The unity is imposed indirectly through the representation of the materiality of living labor as a generically human productive activity or abstract human labor, already objectified in its product under a concrete socially useful form, like the social attribute of exchangeability of this product, that is, as the value of the commodity.

In turn, whatever the historical form that the organization of social labor takes, it is conditional upon the assignment to each producer of the means of production necessary to give their living labor the concrete form in which it will be carried out. This involves the assignment to the producers of the products of past social labor, and therefore labor that is already dead from the point of view of the productive cycle about to begin, upon which they apply their living labor. In the private organization of social labor, this assignment is carried out through private ownership of the means of production. Whoever uses a commodity as a means of production in a cycle, a product of a previous productive cycle, must have recognized it at the time as the product of socially useful labor. And they did so precisely because it was a use value suitable to serve as a means of production. In the production process, living labor, due to its concrete materiality, consumes the material form of the product of dead labor that it uses as a means of production.[3] Consequently, it transforms this materiality, objectifying it directly (in the case of raw materials) or indirectly (in the case of tools) into the use value of its own product. But this material transformation of the old product of dead labor has taken place privately. Therefore, it is now necessary to confirm whether, under the new form in which its materiality has been transformed, said dead labor is still recognized as socially useful—i.e., whether it is useful to individuals other than those who carried out this transformation. And this recognition can only be achieved indirectly through the reappearance of the value of the means of production, in proportion to the extent to which their use value has been materially consumed in the same production cycle, in the value of the new product obtained through that consumption.

[3] In its apologetic inversion, neoclassical economics believes that dead labor comes back to life through the productive use of its product by living labor, a resurrection that turns its product, from a means for the activity of the living subject, into a living subject of social production itself. That is, from a means of production to a 'factor,' that is, a maker, of production.

Chapter 3

The consciousness of commodity producers, that is, the free consciousness which is the concrete form of alienated consciousness

Commodity producers are free individuals who are not subjected to the personal domination of anyone. They own their individual consciousness and will. They have their person at their disposal to apply their individual capacity to perform labor in the concrete way in which their individual consciousness and will consider appropriate. They are, therefore, reciprocally independent in the exercise of their generically human attribute, labor. However, these reciprocally independent individuals are brought together with a degree of social interdependence never before seen in human history. As is common to every historical form, the consumption of each one depends on the production of the rest, through the social division of labor. But, in this case, the consumption of each one depends directly on the consumption of the rest: in order to be able to buy commodities, they must first have sold theirs and, therefore, they must first have satisfied a social consumption need. Under the appearance of being absolutely independent individuals, they are absolutely interdependent individuals. Their absolute social interdependence takes concrete shape in the absence of any direct personal bond. Said interdependence only manifests itself in an indirect manner, through the exchange of commodities in which each one appears to affirm their condition as a fully free individual with respect to the others.

Let us return to the cook who produces ravioli. Let us suppose that he cooks ravioli for his family's dinner. Tired after the day of work, he makes a mistake and puts sugar instead of salt. As his family has a personal bond with him, it could be that they will let him know their repulsion when they try the uneatable ravioli, so that even he will go to bed reproaching himself for having ruined the family's evening. But the next morning, our man will sit to have breakfast as any other day, in his condition as a member of the family. Let us suppose now that he makes the same mistake in the restaurant. The client does not even have to get in personal trouble with him; all they will do is leave without paying the foul meal lacking any use value. The cook might go to sleep somewhat angry at his mistake. But what he will certainly not be able to do is sit at the breakfast table the next day: the family table will be empty because, having not sold his ravioli the day before, today there is nothing to buy the breakfast ingredients with.

As a personally free individual who has full control over his individual labor, the commodity producers realize, above all, that they have to apply their free consciousness and will to produce a use value for social consumption. Let us suppose that, fully conscious of this determination, our cook attentively observes the existing social necessities around him and, confronted with the abundance of malnourished children, he concludes that he cannot go

wrong if he allots his individual portion of social labor power to produce ravioli for them. He will be late to discover that, in the kingdom of personally free individuals that the capitalist mode of production is, for the organization of the labor of society social needs are not presented as a personal attribute. Only the social need which is the bearer of the objectified general social relation counts, i.e. money. That is, only the social need which has purchasing power counts, namely, the solvent social need. And, however needful of nourishment the children may be, they do not carry with them the social bond which expresses this specific form of social need. Without having found someone to sell the product of his private labor to, the cook will be confronted with the fact that his own consumption needs no longer count as social needs and that, therefore, he is forbidden from participating in social consumption. But in the next opportunity, if he has it, he will already know that it is not enough to produce use values for others; that what he must produce are use values which bear value and, as such, are capable of attracting in exchange other objects which also bear value. To put it plainly, he will know that what he must produce is value. That this is the only end to which he must apply his free consciousness and will, as participant in the general organization of the process of human life. That only if he produces value he will have indirectly produced use values for himself. From the point of view of the materiality of the process of social metabolism, productive labor is that which produces social use values; from the specific point of view of the organization of social labor through commodity production, the only productive labor is that which produces value. As expression of a simple human necessity, hunger is hunger; as a necessity capable of expressing itself with respect to the organization of social labor in the capitalist mode of production, only that hunger which has purchasing power counts, "solvent" hunger.

The producer of ravioli in our example ought to be quite a fool if he had to get to this point to only now realize what he has to do. In reality, every commodity producer knows, since their tender childhood, that value has an objective form of existence: money. They know, therefore, just as Marx synthesized it, that their capacity to participate in social consumption - both productive and individual consumption- that is, their general social relation with others, must be carried in their pocket under the form of this thing, money. So that they learn very early on that their capacity to relate socially in a general manner is not their personal attribute but an attribute of the product of their labor expressed in its capacity to attract money and be exchanged for it.

It is not possible to perform labor without applying one's own consciousness and will to the realization of the foreseen end. And the consciousness and will of the commodity producer are those of a free individual, that is, those of an individual who has full control over their individual labor process. Therefore, when they work, they put into action the productive potencies of their individual labor in a more prolific form than that of a worker who is inhibited in their free individual subjectivity by relations of personal dependence. The more the control over their individual labor process belongs to them, that is, the more their consciousness and will rule the determinations of their individual labor, the more the individual is affirmed in their human personality. The free character of labor is, in itself, a human productive force. But, when the commodity producer performs labor, they cannot simply apply their consciousness and will to the production of a use value for others; they must put it at the service of the production of value. Their labor must not only produce a socially useful object, a social use

value; it must produce, at the same time, their general social relation; it must produce value. This is not, then, a mere process of production of use values, socially mediated by their form as values. It is about a social production of use values which is ruled by having as its immediate object the production of value. Social use values and, therefore, human beings, are produced only on the condition that value is produced.

Because their labor is performed in a private and independent manner, the commodity producer has full control over the individual character of their labor process, but lacks all control over its social character; that is, over their social potencies and determinations. The potencies of their own individual labor with respect to the unity of the process of social metabolism completely escape their control. They have no way of dominating the interlacing in which their individual labor necessarily enters with the labor of others, which embodies said process. They cannot perform their labor in a directly social mode, cooperating with other producers, because they lack any social connection with them to organize their collective labor in a direct manner. They cannot even know if their labor is socially useful or not at the moment they carry it out. Their freedom consists in that they consciously rule the determinations of their individual labor on their own, thereby realizing their will. But the social determinations of their labor completely escape the reach of their consciousness, and their will must blindly be subject to it. They are free individuals in their individual labor, but they lack all liberty with respect to the social determinations of their labor.[1] They do not personally bear any capacity to directly participate in the organization of their own process of social metabolism. Hence, they must submit their consciousness and will as free individuals to the social potencies of the product of their labor. They are not subject to the personal domination of anyone, but they must be the servant of their commodity. If they rebel against this condition, if, for example, an independent producer refuses to privately obey the messages concerning the social usefulness or uselessness of their labor which they receive via the market, they end up being prohibited of having their general social relation available to them and, therefore, of reproducing their own life.

Value is not a social attribute belonging to their person, but the material product of their labor. Therefore, it is a social attribute of an object exterior to their person, an object which, however much the product of their conscious and willful activity, and however much it belongs to them as their private property, it is different than their person. In those societies organized on the basis of the direct relations between persons -whether they are those of the primitive community, slavery, feudalism, the modern family or friendships, etc.- each individual bears their social dependence as their personal attribute. Their social bond is inseparable from their personality as members of such societies. On the contrary, the commodity producer lacks any capacity to directly relate to others in general; this social attribute is alien to their person. It is therefore no coincidence that they are individuals free of any bond of direct personal dependence. Their free consciousness and will have been applied at the service of a social potency alien to them and which belongs to the commodity: it, and not their producers, is the

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[1] Let us recall, again, the synthesis made by Engels:

> Freedom of the will therefore means nothing but the capacity to make decisions with knowledge of the subject. (Engels, Friedrich (1877) Anti-Dühring: Herr Eugen Dühring's revolution in science, Foreign Languages Pub. House, 1959, p. 157)

one which has the capacity, the potency, to socially relate with others in exchange. The material product of their labor confronts them as a social potency which is alien to them and to which they must submit their consciousness and will as free individuals. Since the will of the commodity producer has full control over the private exercise of their individual labor performed in an independent manner with respect to others, it is completely subject to the social potencies of the product of this labor. Therefore, the free consciousness and will of the commodity producers are the form in which the alienation of their consciousness and will as attributes of the commodity is realized. In the same act in which they affirm themselves as bearers of a free consciousness and will in the individual richness of their generically human attributes, that is, in the same act in which they put into action their free consciousness and will to rule their individual labor process in a private and independent manner, what they are putting into action is their consciousness and will alienated in the commodity. The act in which their consciousness and will dominate by themselves the determinations of their individual labor affirming them as free individuals, is the act in which their consciousness and will give shape to their impotence to rule the social determinations of their labor, realizing their absolute lack of freedom with respect to them. The moment in which they act as free individuals producing commodities, is the moment in which they act as producers of value and, therefore, as individuals alienated in their commodity. The act in which their free consciousness and will materially submit things to their private dominion, is ruled by the subjection of their free consciousness and will to the domination that those same things exert over them, as bearers of the social character of their labor. Their free consciousness and will are the form in which their alienated consciousness is realized. The commodity producer needs to apply the attributes of their human personality, their consciousness and will, as if they were attributes of their commodity. They must act as personifications of their commodity. From the point of view of their participation in social labor, this free producer cannot have more will than that of producing value. For the organization of their social labor they do not count as persons, but as personification of their commodity. Only as such personification they may relate socially, that is, count for the exercise of their general social relation. Thus, we could say that, as far as his person is concerned, the cook who owns the restaurant may be called John Pippin, but from the point of view of the organization of social labor, he had better be recognized as Mister Ravioli. Again, the free consciousness and will of the commodity producers are the concrete form of their consciousness and will alienated in the commodity.

When an individual works they affirm themselves in their generically human being. And this affirmation reaches its full breadth when the control over the determinations of the individual expenditure of the laboring individual's body is under the complete command of their consciousness and will. Therefore, when the commodity producer works, they affirm themselves in their generically human being over and above the slave or the serf, whose individual labor processes are subject to the personal domination of others. But the commodity producer realizes this full affirmation of their human personality only at the expense of negating it in their personal impotence to rule the social determinations of their labor. The domination of these determinations confronts them as a potency alien to their labor, which autonomously belongs to the things which are a product of the realization of their generically human being. This implies that the potencies of their own generic human being are presented to

them in an inverted form as the attribute of the social potencies of these things, at whose service they must submit their consciousness and will as free persons.

In order to reproduce their human personality, to affirm themselves as persons, that is, to be able to consume as human beings and so consume the use values which are products of social labor, the commodity producers need to have affirmed themselves as personifications of their commodity beforehand. They need to have produced a social use value which bears value. For example, for a father, giving his children to eat affirms him in the personal attributes of being a father; it concerns his personal necessity. But, in the capitalist mode of production, it is impossible to realize this condition as human person without before having properly acted in the condition of personification of the commodity: to buy the food for the children, he must have first sold another commodity. A little more informally, we could say that it is not possible to exercise the attributes typical of a "good" person without having before acted as a good personification of the commodity, even if this was only at the necessary minimum. Which, of course, does not imply that the inverse relation has equal necessity: one can be an excellent personification of value but a scum as a person. "He who has money does what he wants", says the popular saying, clearly recognizing that the free exercise of the will is not an attribute that the person has at their disposal by themselves, but that it is an attribute their materialized general social relation reflects in it. When then commodity producer looks at their commodity, they are not simply seeing the material product of their social labor, not even the material product of the exercise of their free consciousness insofar as it rules by itself the determinations of their individual labor: what they are seeing is the objectified form, exterior to them, which the determination of their consciousness as free individuals has and, therefore, what they are seeing is their own alienated consciousness.

This business of being a person whose free consciousness and will are alienated as social attributes of their own material product certainly does not appear as a condition which merits celebration. However, what does the commodity producer owe their condition as free individual to? They owe it to the fact that they are not subject to any personal dependence in the organization of their individual labor; that is, to the fact that they perform their labor in a private and independent manner. So that the unity of the process of social production and consumption of which they are individual organs, is established through the representation of the socially necessary labor individually expended in a private and independent manner as the value of commodities. If it did not establish itself in this mode, it would need to do it through the relations of direct dependence between persons. Only through these relations, could the producers organize their labor in a directly social manner. In which case, far from being free individuals with respect to one another, the producers would carry in their persons a multitude of relations of mutual subjection. The commodity producers owe their free consciousness and will precisely to the fact that they produce commodities, to the fact that they do not perform their labor in an immediately social manner but in a private and independent manner, to the fact that they produce an object which has the social attribute of confronting them as alien to them and consequently controls them. Therefore, the commodity producers owe their free consciousness and will to their alienated consciousness and will. They are free of any personal servitude because they are the servants of the social character of their product. The free consciousness and will of the individual, the individual free of any personal subjection, is far

from being an abstractly natural product. It is only born into history as a specific product of commodity production and, therefore, as the product of the alienated consciousness in them. Such is the objective nature of human freedom. The commodity producer is the first, and so far the only, free human being in history.

Chapter 4

The Commodity*

4.1 The two factors of the commodity: use value and value (substance and magnitude of value)

Dialectical knowledge, that is, the reproduction of the concrete through the path of thought, can have no other starting point than the concrete itself. Marx highlights this necessity at the very starting point of the exposition, which can only take the form of an immediate observation:[1]

> The wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails appears to us as an 'immense wealth of commodities,' and the commodity as its elementary form. (p. 3)

As a result of immediate observation, all the relationships that manifest themselves at the starting point do so in their most absolute externality. The relationship between capital and commodity is so external here that it manifests itself doubly as such. First, the commodity does not appear to have any connection with capital other than being a form present in the mode of production in which capital prevails. Second, the commodity does not even appear as a product, but as the element of a mere accumulation whose source is not immediately evident. Having before it nothing more than purely external relations, the knowledge that seeks to overcome all appearance has only one course open to it: to analytically penetrate the interior of the commodity, to seek there the necessity that has been realized in the immediate appearance presented by it: "Therefore, our investigation begins with the analysis of the commodity."[2]

Before starting this course, let us note several points. First of all, positioned as we are at the very starting point, it is far from evident that the necessity which determines this starting point as such truly exists. In fact, this necessity is indistinguishable from that which could also arise from choosing, as a starting point, any other immediate observation from among the infinite multitude offered by the capitalist mode of production, and even from the social wealth within it. But, if one intended to establish immediately the necessity that determines the starting

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* All the quotes included in this chapter that are referenced to their source only with a page number below the text correspond to Karl Marx, Capital, Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1973, Volume I.

[1] If one wanted to start from any product of thought itself, whether a conception, an assumption, a definition, a category, etc., the course to follow would be governed from the outset by the ideal necessity that gives coherence to that construction, rather than by the real necessity that one is trying to understand.

[2] Marx, Capital, op. cit., vol. I, p. 3

point as such, it could only be done by resorting to a development external to it, capable of reproducing in thought the real necessity of the concrete. Only the development itself of this reproduction can account for the necessity of its own starting point. And it will not be such a reproduction if it does not do so. Being able to start directly from the already discovered starting point as the most efficient for accounting for the concrete forms of the capitalist mode of production is an expression of the power that our process of knowledge acquires insofar as it is determined as a process of recognition from the social point of view. Thus, the course we follow from here must account doubly for the necessity of its starting point: both as a critique of its own development and as a critique of preexisting dialectical knowledge from the social point of view.

Secondly, it is not a question of constructing a concept of commodity based on the attributes that are present to a greater or lesser extent in the mass of them. On the contrary, it is about discovering the necessity that determines the commodity as such. Hence, the issue is above all to analyze the commodity as an element of the accumulation, not the accumulation itself. The accumulation will come into play again, then, as soon as the need discovered in the commodity as its elementary form requires it.

Thirdly, the immediate observation that has discovered the commodity as the elementary form of wealth has discovered it as such within the capitalist mode of production. Therefore, by penetrating it, the analysis will only penetrate the capitalist mode of production itself. All the determinations found within the analyzed commodity are determinations of this mode of production, even if, considered in isolation, they may appear as the very negation of the concrete forms proper to capitalism. At no point will one have transcended the capitalist mode of production to other modes, except when an explicit comparison with them is established. Our starting point does not place us on the path of confronting the development of a historical process as such, but rather before a present that is the synthesis of historical development.

Whatever the necessity immediately realized in a real object, that is, any determination that makes an object what it is in its immediate concreteness, has only one way of manifesting itself. Namely, it manifests as a potentiality inherent in the object, as an ability or quality intrinsic to the object, in its relation to the subject:

> The commodity is, first and foremost, an external object, a thing capable of satisfying human needs, of whatever kind they may be (p. 3)

This aptitude or capacity of the commodity extends to the universality of human needs, from those that correspond to the purely natural process of producing human life, to those that are inherent to the generically human organization of that natural process, that is, the needs generated by thought itself:

> The nature of these needs, whether they arise, for example, from the stomach or from imagination, is of no interest whatsoever for these purposes (p. 3).

At the same time, the external character of the commodity with respect to the human individual whose needs it can satisfy refers to a second aspect of the unity between the natural process of appropriating useful objects and the generically human form that this appropriation takes. In this sense, the universality of the capacity of commodities to satisfy human needs encompasses both the objects of the individual consumption process and those of the process of transforming external nature into a means to produce objects suitable for individual consumption:

> Nor does it matter, from this point of view, how that object satisfies human needs, whether directly, as a means of livelihood, or as an object of enjoyment, or indirectly, as a means of production (p. 3).

But where it specifically measured the development of the capacity to transform the environment—from something external into a means for itself, which defines the human race—is in the discovery of the object's ability to satisfy human needs and the invention of the necessary measures to express its quantity:

> Each object [...] represents a set of the most diverse properties and can therefore be used in the most varied ways. The discovery of these different aspects, and therefore of the various modes of using things, constitutes a historical fact. The same applies to the invention of social measures to express the quantity of useful objects (p. 3).

Not from the point of view of the object itself, but from that of the subject who is going to appropriate the aptitude or capacity that the object has, it manifests itself as the utility or value that the object has with respect to a certain end. Immediately, the commodity appears as a materially suitable object to satisfy human needs, that is, as a use value or usefulness for the subject:

> The usefulness of an object turns it into a use value (p. 3).

Even in the case where the need arises from the world of ideas in which the organization of the natural process of human life takes shape, the ability to satisfy human needs is inseparable from the very body of the use value:

> But this usefulness of objects does not float in the air. It is something that is conditioned by the material qualities of the commodity and cannot exist without them. What constitutes a use-value or a good is, therefore, the materiality of the commodity itself (pp. 3-4)

It is now the use-value that refers to the external character of the object that carries it and to the indifference regarding whether its appropriation involves purely natural human action or the kind that is specifically human, that is, labor. No matter how much the use-value of a commodity is mediated by human labor, the magnitude of the latter is in itself unrelated to the

determination of that utility:

> And this character of the commodity does not depend on whether the appropriation of its useful qualities costs man a lot or a little labor (p. 4).

The appropriation of the commodity's ability to satisfy human needs, that is, the realization of its use value, cannot take a form independent of the consumption process itself or of the materiality of the object that carries it, that is, it cannot take on a substantive existence:

> Use value only takes shape in the use or consumption of objects (p. 4).

The analysis of the use-value of commodities thus exhausts the evidence of its general character:

> Use values make up the material content of wealth, regardless of its social form (p. 4).

The analysis of use value thus seems to inevitably lead beyond the specificity indicated by the starting point, to the societies where the capitalist mode of production prevails. However, by fully revealing the general character of use value, it only highlights a particular aptitude or capacity that the use value of a commodity inherently carries, namely, the ability to be exchanged for the body of another commodity.[3] This aptitude, from the perspective of the one who is going to appropriate it, appears as the value the object has for exchange, that is, its exchange value:

> In the type of society we intend to study, use-values are also the material support of exchange value (p. 4).

But this evidence is all that the immediate analysis of use value can say about the specificity of the commodity. Let us put the matter in more prosaic terms, looking at it from outside the commodity itself. Suppose a bowl of soup. Or, more precisely, three materially identical bowls of soup, but prepared by three different people. The first, prepared by a slave for the consumption of their master. The second, by a father for his child. And the third, by a restaurant cook. Suppose that being served by a slave afraid of their master, by a loving father, or by an indifferent restaurant cook neither adds nor subtracts from the use value of the bowl of soup. We therefore have three identical use-values, intended to satisfy someone else's need besides that of their respective producers, and therefore a social need relative to them. However, only the bowl of soup prepared by the restaurant cook carries exchange value, that is, the capacity to transform its materiality through exchange. It can become, for example, the handkerchief that the cook needs to wipe the sweat dripping from his forehead while stirring

[3] Let us note that this means that, for example, for the holder of a table, its materiality has the peculiar ability to be exchanged for the body of five books, without any material process of transformation taking place.

the soup, if both have the same exchange value. Only the soup from the restaurant cook is a commodity. In contrast, the soup from the slave and the father can only be transformed into another object for them through the physical-chemical processes to which it may be subjected. For example, overcooking can turn a bowl of soup into a mush, but never into a handkerchief, no matter how much the concerned parties sweat on their foreheads. Where did the bowl of soup prepared by the restaurant cook acquire that truly fantastic attribute of being able to change into another object? Let us also note that only this bowl of soup is the specific object of our analysis, and therefore, this must account precisely for the specificity in question.

There is no further path open to analysis than to delve into the second attribute of the commodity, its suitability for exchange, or, which is the same for the subject, its exchange value.

Every real concrete form is determined as such by its specific quality. In turn, this specific quality is always present in a given magnitude, that is, it is quantitatively determined. The use value left no doubt about it:

> When assessing a use value, it is always assumed to be specified in a quantity ... (p. 4).

The progress in the analysis of the quantitative determination of a specific real form in order to discover its necessity therefore presupposes starting from the analysis of the quality that delineates that form. In other words, it is not possible to measure the magnitude of an object without first recognizing what is the quality that determines that object as such. Up to this point, the analysis has not gone beyond discovering exchange value as a quality in itself, as the commodity's capacity for exchange. But as soon as one attempts to analytically confront this quality to discover its necessity, it seems to contain nothing more than a purely quantitative determination:

> At first glance, exchange value appears as the quantitative relationship, the proportion in which use values of one kind are exchanged for use values of another. It seems, then, as if exchange value were something purely accidental and relative, as if, therefore, the existence of an internal exchange value, inherent in the commodity, were a contradiction in terms.[4]

However, this immediate appearance of exchange value as an abstract quantitative relation dissolves as soon as it is analyzed. Because, from the analysis learned in elementary school, anyone knows that you cannot add pears and apples. People can only establish a quantitative relation between things that have, in their very objectivity, a common quality. The

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[4] Here arises the possibility of observing that the appearance of exchange value as a purely quantitative relationship does not correspond directly to the exchange of use values for one another, but rather to the exchange of use values for money. In other words, the exchange of use values for an object that has no use value other than serving for exchange itself. However, if commodities are exchanged for money, and money has no use value other than being exchangeable for commodities, by a transitive property, the unity of exchanging commodities for money and money for commodities lies in the exchange of one commodity for another. Thus, after having made one more analytical step explicit, we reach the same starting point in the analysis of exchange value that we encounter immediately with Marx.

fact that a quantitative relation (equality) is established between different use values tells analysis that these use values must have, as their own attribute, being materializations of a common substance. And that this substance is, of course, distinct from the quantitative relation itself. It cannot arise from it; on the contrary, what it does is express itself in it:

> From this it follows: first, that the various exchange values of the same commodity all express something the same; second, that the exchange value is not and cannot be more than the expression of a differentiable content of it, its 'form of manifestation.' Let us now take two commodities [...] Whatever the proportion in which they are exchanged, it can always be represented by an equality [...] What does this equality tell us? That in the two distinct objects [...] there is contained a common something of equal magnitude. ... To determine and compare [...] exchange values [...] it is necessary to reduce them to a common something with respect to which they represent more or less (pp. 4-5).

In its own development, the immediate analysis of the dual character of the commodity thus highlights that it is not sufficient to account for the necessity of this, nor, therefore, for the specificity of the commodity. But this immediate analysis is not limited to showing that it has reached its limit in an abstract way. It demonstrates its own limit, precisely, by indicating that the search for the reason for the specificity of the commodity can only proceed further if one now analytically penetrates into the unity of use-value and exchange-value in the search for the necessity of this unity.[5] And the analysis has nowhere to look for the necessity that determines this dual capacity of commodities, except in the very source from which this capacity has emerged.

If a thing has a certain aptitude, the source of it is the action that has transformed the thing from something that until then existed without that specific aptitude into something that carries it. In other words, that aptitude is the result of the action that produced the thing as its bearer. There is no attribute without the action that produced it. Thus, to ask about the necessity of the attribute is, immediately, to ask about the character of the action that gave rise to it. It makes no difference, in this sense, whether the transformative action is purely natural, or whether it is a natural action already developed in its specific concrete form as human action. And it remains the same even when it is no longer a mere human action, but a human action specifically determined as an action consciously aimed at transforming an external object into the bearer of a certain material aptitude, that is, the work that produces use-values and, in summary, labor.

Whatever the commodity taken from among the mass of them, its condition as a use-value is mediated by the transformation of nature through human labor. And even things that in capitalist society appear to have exchange value but are not in themselves use-values, such

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[5] Even here, where the aim is to discover something that commodities have in common, the analysis does not take the form of separating what is repeated from what is not in the universe of commodities. On the contrary, the analysis continues to take the form of searching for the necessity of that common element which, as such, is present in any individual commodity under consideration. It suffices, therefore, to continue penetrating the commodity as that elementary form of wealth revealed by the immediate observation of the society where the capitalist mode of production prevails.

as, for example, morality or loyalty, owe this capacity to human action: the use-value that the buyer receives from someone else's morality is not the morality itself, but the concrete result of immoral action. However, it is evident that in the capitalist mode of production, at least one use-value appears that has the capacity for exchange and is not a product of human labor: virgin land. Thus, the immediate analysis of the source of use-value is not sufficient by itself to determine whether commodities owe their capacity for exchange to the labor that produces them, or if it is a capacity that can be given by the action of natural forces on their own. But what the analysis does make clear up to this point is that, having discovered exchange value as an attribute carried by the corporeal materiality of the use-value of the commodity, the action that produces the capacity for exchange is inseparable from the one that produces the capacity for use. Or, in legal terms, the analysis has already made it clear that the commodity as a use-value and the commodity as an exchange value is necessarily the product of a dual specificity inherent in a single and same action. Since the analysis of use-value cannot determine whether this action is purely natural in character or is human labor, the only course left is to penetrate analytically into exchange value in search of the source of that common content manifested in it.

The issue can be summarized in the following question: as a result of what specific action, whether natural or human, is the common content objectified in the commodity, whose quantitative equality is manifested in exchange? First of all, the exchange of commodities is a purely human action. But the human action of exchange by itself leaves the materiality of the commodity intact. Just as the commodity comes out of exchange having a use value, it has already entered it with that use value. Therefore, exchange is irrelevant to the determination of the material suitability of commodities to satisfy human needs. If it ultimately turns out that commodities owe their use value to the mediation of human action on nature, the action of exchange is excluded from the outset as such a source. And once it is excluded as a source of use value, the human action of exchange is immediately excluded as a possible source of exchange value.[6] The exchange of commodities thus appears, up to this point, as a human action in which the quantitative equality of a common content is expressed, which commodities have by being the result of a productive action. The analysis still needs to determine whether this action is purely natural or a human action.

Except for those who believe they see in the movements of nature the inscrutable designs of a divine will, it is obvious that there is no product of purely natural action that can constitute a common content whose quantitative equality is expressed in a synthesized human action such as the exchange of commodities. In other words, exchange is a human action powerless to measure the magnitude of the action that nature has had in the production of the use-values being exchanged, even assuming that the various forms that this natural action takes could be reduced to a common unit and that this had a finite magnitude. Conversely, no natural action can transform, for example, a table into three pairs of trousers, whereas exchange is

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[6] As we have already seen and will see again later, those who try to explain the ability of a commodity to be exchanged by the very act of exchange do nothing but make the cause of the exchangeability of commodities the fact of this exchangeability itself. The same is done by assigning exchangeability to the intentionality of productive action regarding exchange. The fact that a use-value is produced with the intention of being exchanged does not guarantee its exchangeability at all. Exchangeability is an attribute objectified in the commodity beyond all will of the subject of the action that produced it.

perfectly capable of doing so. Therefore, natural actions enter, according to their different qualities and in the magnitude corresponding to these, into the determination of the fitness of commodities for use.[7] But they have no way of doing so in determining the purely quantitative equality of commodities in which their fitness for exchange is expressed:

> This common element cannot consist of a geometric, physical, or chemical property, nor of any other natural property of commodities. The material properties of things only matter when we consider them as useful objects, that is, as use-values. ... As use-values, commodities represent, above all, distinct qualities; as exchange-values, they are only distinguished by quantity: therefore, they contain not even an atom of use-value (p. 5).

Once the purely natural action that transforms an object into something suitable for satisfying human needs is removed as the source of common substance whose quantitative equality is expressed in exchange, the analysis turns to the other action that produces use values. That is, the human action that consciously and voluntarily applies itself to objects in order to make them suitable for satisfying human needs: labor. Since it is a human action, it not only appears as specifically limited and, as such, commensurable, but it also leaves behind the absolutely foreign condition that purely natural action presented in relation to the human action of exchange. However, the fact that labor has been revealed as the possible source of common substance whose equality is expressed in the exchange relation is merely the starting point of the analysis that must account for the necessity of labor as such a source. First of all, labor cannot be treated simply as such. In fact, if labor produced that common content merely by virtue of the same attributes that determine it as a producer of use values, exchange value and use value would be the same thing and could not be distinguished from one another. The specificity of labor in producing the exchangeability of commodities must necessarily be the same as has already been revealed in the specificity of exchange value with respect to the specificity of use value; that is, the one that has already been materialized in the difference between what is qualitatively distinct and what is only quantitatively distinct from one commodity to another:

> ... if we disregard the use value of commodities, they only retain one characteristic: being products of labor. But not products of real and concrete labor. By disregarding their use value, we also disregard the material elements and forms that make them such use values.... With the useful character of the products of labor, the useful character of the labor they represent will disappear, and consequently, the various concrete forms of this labor will also disappear, which will cease to be distinguished from one another and be reduced all to the same human labor, to abstract human labor.... the same spectral materiality, a mere coagulation of indistinct human labor, that is, of the employment of

[7] If we approach the question from an external perspective, considering the development of the commodity itself, it becomes obvious that natural forces operate in exactly the same way in the production of commodities as in the production of use values, which lack the capacity for exchange. Since their intervention is not specific to the production of commodities, it can hardly be specific to what distinguishes commodities from mere social use values, namely, their exchangeability.

> human labor power, without regard at all to the way in which this power is employed.... Well, considered as crystallizations of this social substance common to all of them, these objects are values, commodity-values (pp. 5-6).

With the discovery of the substance that turns use-values into objects carrying the capacity for exchange, the analysis of exchange value comes to an end. But this end merely paves the way for the analysis of value itself. Exchange value will only reappear on the scene, then, when the time has come to confront value, not to uncover its determinations as such, but when the analysis has exhausted the possibility of moving forward and made evident that it can only proceed by accompanying the realization of those determinations in their necessary concrete forms:

> Let us now focus on the exchange relation of commodities. It seems as if the exchange value itself were something entirely independent of their use values. And indeed, by truly setting aside the use value of the products of labor, we obtain value as we have just defined it ([Roces turns the determination of value into a 'definition'; both in Justo's translation and in Scaron's, the expression used is 'determine'; JIC]). That common something that takes shape in the exchange relation or exchange value of commodities is, therefore, their value. In the course of our investigation, we will return to exchange value as a necessary expression or the inevitable form in which value manifests itself, which for now we will study independently of this form (pp. 5-6).

Since the specificity of abstract labor lies in the fact that it is alien to any qualitative differentiation between concrete labors, no more specific distinction can exist within it than that which may arise from the quantitative expression of the mere expenditure of human labor power. Thus, once the source of the common social substance manifested in exchange value has been discovered, the analysis cannot proceed except by advancing into the quantitative determination of that substance:

> How is the magnitude of this value measured? By the amount of "value-creating substance," that is, work, that it contains. And, in turn, the amount of work it contains is measured by the time of its duration (p. 6).

And the analysis of the magnitude of value then highlights the possibility of a qualitative difference within abstract labor itself:

> It will be said that [...] goods will contain more value the lazier or clumsier the person who produces them is... (p. 6).

It is therefore necessary to delve more deeply into the abstract labor spent in producing the commodity, in order to find the specific difference that distinguishes within it the producer of value from one who is not:

> ...the labor that constitutes the substance of values is equal human labor, an investment of the same human labor-power. It is as if all the labor-power of society, materialized in the totality of the values that constitute the world of commodities, represented for these purposes an immense human labor-power, despite being the sum of countless individual labor-powers. Each of these individual labor-powers is a human labor-power equivalent to the others, provided that [...] in order to produce a commodity it consumes the socially necessary labor-time, that is, the socially necessary labor-time for its production... Considered as values, commodities are all nothing more than certain quantities of crystallized labor-time (pp. 6-7).

Having made this discovery, the analysis of the magnitude of value then shifts from confronting its absolute determination to confronting the necessity of its changes:

> The magnitude of the value of a commodity would therefore remain constant and unchanged if the amount of labor time required for its production also remained constant. But this changes as the productive capacity of labor changes... Therefore, the magnitude of the value of a commodity changes in direct proportion to the quantity and in inverse proportion to the productive capacity of the labor invested in it (pp. 7-8).

At this point, the analysis of the commodity once again goes beyond it. But in doing so now, it does not confront what the commodity has as mere use-value as a product of human labor. On the contrary, it first confronts what the mere use-value cannot have unless it is a product of human labor:

> An object can be a use-value without being a value. This happens when the utility that this object holds for humans is not due to labor. Such is the case with air, virgin land, natural prairies, wild forests, etc. (p. 8)

Which makes it clear that, no matter how much aptitude for exchange virgin land appears to have, it is neither a value nor, therefore, a commodity in itself. It is only formally so. And it becomes evident, then, that the analysis of the commodity by itself is not capable of accounting for the exchangeability of virgin land. But, for the same reason, it becomes evident that there is only one path open to the search for the reason for this aptitude. At this point, the general exchangeability of commodities has not shown to have any more relation to the exchangeability of virgin land than the purely external one corresponding to the norm in relation to its exception. But this very external relation already makes it clear that it is the development of the norm alone that can account for the necessity of its exception. Therefore, one can only proceed with the analysis of the commodity, without forgetting that this and the reverse process of development of the specific necessary forms in which the commodity realizes its determination must, by themselves, account for the necessity of the commodity form that virgin land presents in capitalism.[8]

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[8] We can note, at this point, the external nature to the expository development of the analysis of the

Secondly, the analysis faces what the product of human labor cannot have if it is not the product of social labor in the sense of being made to be consumed by someone else:

> And an object can also be useful and a product of human labor without being a commodity. The products of labor intended to satisfy the personal needs of the one who creates them are, undoubtedly, use values, but not commodities. To produce commodities, it is not enough to produce use values; it is necessary to produce use values for others, social use values (p. 8).

At this point, the analysis of the commodity as a unit of use value and exchange value has said all that could be said about its specificity. This analysis has accounted for the necessity of the substance that determines commodities as objects that have the capacity for exchange, and for the determination of the magnitude of their exchangeability. Up to this point, it has uncovered the value of commodities as socially necessary abstract labor, in the dual sense of its magnitude and of having been performed for the consumption of others, expended to produce them and, therefore, having transformed its own materiality into the materiality of commodities, which has been materialized in them. Thus, value comes into the world as an attribute of commodities at the very moment that this labor is expended, that is, at the very moment of their production. However, no matter how far it has progressed up to here, the analysis of the commodity still lacks a way to account for the very reason for this exchangeability.[9]

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commodity as value, that the observation introduced by us concerning the possibility that virgin land could be the commodity being analytically examined has: virgin land is not a product of human labor, and what determines a commodity as such is merely being a commodity. Therefore, the very act of stating that a commodity is being analyzed implies the elimination of virgin land as a starting point. But this circumstance could not be made evident at the very starting point of the exposition. Consequently, an appearance may be created that the omission of a path open to analysis is being forced:

> It is clear that the method of exposition must be formally distinguished from the method of investigation. Research must aim to thoroughly understand the subject under investigation, to analyze its various forms of development, and to discover its internal connections. Only after completing this work can the researcher proceed to properly present the actual movement. And if they know how to do it and manage to ideally reflect in the exposition the life of the subject, there is always the possibility that one gets the impression of being faced with an a priori construction (p. XXIII).

[9] Let us note that Engels considers it necessary to add the following specification within the results of the analysis of the substance and magnitude of value: "(And not only for others, purely and simply. ... To be a commodity, the product must pass into the hands of another, of the one who consumes it, through an act of exchange)" (addition made by Engels to the 4th German edition, p. 8). The analysis of the commodity has so far revealed nothing more than what Marx strictly says. The specificity of the act of exchange will only manifest itself with the development of the analysis of the dual character of commodity-producing labor. On the contrary, Engels' addition reverses the determination. It makes the commodity appear as determined as such by the act of exchange, instead of revealing the act of exchange as the concrete form necessary for the realization of the determination inherent in the commodity.

But this does not mean it has become a dead end. On the contrary, having discovered abstract human labor producing commodities as the source of value, it points to a deeper analysis of this source as the path that must necessarily be followed in the search for the specificity of the commodity.

Let us return, for a moment, to our three bowls of soup. All three have been produced as use values for others; therefore, all three are social use values. All three are the product of the same concrete labor, the making of soup. And let us suppose that making all three took the same amount of labor time, corresponding to the socially necessary time for it. So all three bowls of soup are materializations of the investment of the same human labor power. Neither the fear of the slave nor the love of the father allows them to produce use values without expending their labor power, regardless of the form in which this power is applied. All three bowls of soup are, therefore, identical materializations of socially necessary abstract labor. However, only that spent by the restaurant cook has been able to manifest as value, defining its product as a commodity. What peculiarity does the socially necessary abstract labor of the restaurant cook have that confers this attribute on his product?

4.2 Double character of the labor represented by commodities

The focus of the analysis is no longer on discovering what determines a commodity as a value, that is, as a use-value which, as a materialization of socially necessary abstract labor, has the capacity to be exchanged for another as its equivalent. Rather, it is on discovering what specific quality labor, abstracted from its concrete forms, must possess to be capable of granting its material product this purely social aptitude:

> We saw at the beginning that the commodity had two aspects: use value and exchange value. Later we encountered again that labor expressed in value did not present the same characteristics as the labor that creates use values. Until now, no one had critically highlighted this dual character of labor represented by the commodity. And since this point is the pivot around which the understanding of political economy revolves, we must stop to examine it with some care. (p. 9)

Up to this point, abstract labor has been presented to analysis as the simple residue resulting from the sterilization of all material qualitative difference. The task, then, is to move beyond this appearance in order to uncover the quality of its own materiality that makes it manifest in that way. However, the analysis of labor cannot confront the quality of abstract labor except by analyzing its materiality as concrete labor. Thus, immediately, the necessity of the exchangeability of commodities is presented to analysis, arising from the concrete character of the labor that produces them as use-values:

> If they were not qualitatively different use-values and, therefore, products of qualitatively different useful labor as well, those objects could under no circumstances

> confront each other as commodities. It is not practical to exchange [...] use-values for other identical ones (p. 9).

And it is this very specific capacity of labor as concrete labor that once again brings the analysis face to face with the general social character of the labor that produces commodities:

> Beneath the throng of various use-values or commodities, a range of useful labors, no less varied, parades before us [...]: it is the social division of labor... (p. 9)

But immediately, the evidence of the social character of commodity-producing labor seems to drag the analysis beyond the specificity of the societies where the capitalist mode of production prevails:

> ... is the social division of labor, a condition of the production of commodities, even if the latter is not, in turn, a condition of the social division of labor (p. 9).

However, it is the same general character of the social division of labor that places analysis in front of the specificity presented by this division when it comes to commodity production: in this production, the social division of labor is mediated by the exchange of the products of individual labor. And when confronted with this mediation, analysis uncovers its necessity in the absence of a direct link between the individual producers of the social product, that is, in the deprivation of others from participating in the organization of the portion of social labor that each of them individually performs. Each individual commodity producer determines, through their own will, the concrete manner in which they will apply their human labor power: what, how, and how much they will produce. Therefore, the exercise of the individual being as a generically human being, of their labor, is governed according to their own consciousness, that is, freely. At the same time, their consciousness is excluded from participating in the organization of the labor carried out by any other individual commodity producer. There is no foreign individual will, but there is also no collective will, not even one that includes the individual will of the interested party, that governs the expenditure of individual labor power applied to the production of commodities. Commodity-producing labor is thus social labor performed privately by reciprocally independent producers:

> Only the products of private works independent from each other can assume the character of commodities in mutual relations ... In a society whose products generally take the form of commodities, that is, in a society of commodity producers, this qualitative difference observed between the various useful works carried out independently of each other as activities belonging to different independent producers develops into a complex system, eventually becoming a social division of labor (pp. 9-10).

However, the analysis has discovered that the use values owe their determination as commodities to the private and independent manner in which the social labor that produces

them is carried out, at the expense of understanding the necessity of this determination by its sheer exteriority—that is, by the mere repetition of the presence of the attribute. And, although it is the analysis of the concrete character of different kinds of labor that leads to the discovery of social labor performed privately and independently as the specific source of value, this character alone cannot account for the specificity of the commodity's exchangeability. As soon as the analysis tries to continue deepening in it, it finds itself once again led outside the specificity of the capitalist mode of production:

> ... all elements of material wealth not provided by nature must always owe their existence to a specific, useful productive activity, through which they are made suitable for certain human needs from the materials that nature provides to man. As a creator of use-values, that is, as useful labor, work is [...] a condition of human life, and a condition independent of all forms of society, a perpetual and natural necessity without which the organic exchange between man and nature could not be conceived, nor, consequently, human life (p. 10).

Thus, the analysis of the concrete character of labor only has to advance into the relationship between human action and natural action in the production of commodities, as a determination that arises in this very production. In this way, it only remains to make evident what the immediate analysis of the commodity had already made evident, though in the external way in which one action appeared as the abstract opposite of the other. The materiality of the commodity is nothing but the result of human labor acting to transform nature into use-values:

> ... commodities considered as physical objects are combinations of two elements: matter, which is provided by nature, and labor. If we set aside the totality of useful labor contained [...], there will always remain a material substrate, which is what nature offers to man without the intervention of his hand. In its production, man can only act as nature itself acts, that is, by causing matter to change shape.... Labor is, therefore, not the sole and exclusive source of the use values it produces, of material wealth (p. 10).

One can only proceed analytically regarding the abstract character of commodity-producing labor:

> If we disregard the concrete nature of productive activity and, therefore, the usefulness of work, what remains of it? Simply, the expenditure of human labor power remains... the productive expenditure of human brain, muscle, nerves, arm, etc. (p. 11).

The analysis of commodity-producing work thus reveals that, no matter how abstract labor may appear as something completely immaterial, that is, as the value of the commodity, or rather, as its capacity to be exchanged, it is in itself a purely material existence. In other words, this analysis shows that value is fundamentally based on the pure materiality of abstract labor. Before labor is performed, there is, on one hand, a human body (including, of course, its

capacity for thought) of a certain magnitude, and therefore with the potential to be transformed into a certain amount of labor, and on the other hand, an external object of a certain concrete form. Whatever the concrete form of the labor and its object, when the labor is carried out, a certain amount of the existing human body is transformed from potential energy for transforming the external object, first into transforming energy in the very act of labor, and finally into energy incorporated in the new material form presented by the external object on which the labor was applied. The amount to which the human body has been reduced in magnitude is nothing but the amount by which the energy applied in the current formation of the object has increased, in the specific form of human labor expenditure in general. This is what in ordinary physics is known as the principle of conservation of energy. But, in turn, what is specific to socially necessary labor performed privately and independently is that this purely material conservation of expended human energy is represented as a purely immaterial attribute of the objects in which this conservation has been realized.

Let us note how, from the outset, when analyzing the commodity, the materiality of abstract labor first appeared as the result of the simple indifference between concrete labors, as what they simply have in common. But now, when analyzing labor itself, abstract and concrete labor are shown in the true relation corresponding to their respective determination as such, that is, insofar as the generic power of the conscious expenditure of the human organism intended to transform the external environment into a means for itself is realized under the distinct concrete forms that give that transformation its specific utility.

In facing work in its entirety as abstract work and concrete work, the analysis reveals that the generic materiality of the former contains a specific differentiation with respect to its undifferentiated nature as a substance that equates commodities in exchange. This difference arises from the degree of formation of the labor power required to apply abstract work in one concrete form or another:

> ... in order to be applied in such or such a form, it is necessary that human labor power acquire a greater or lesser degree of development. But, in itself, the value of the commodity represents only human labor, simply and purely the expenditure of human labor. Human labor is the use of that simple labor power that every ordinary person, on average, possesses in their physical body, without the need for any special education (p. 11).

However, complex labor is nothing more than a consumption of brain, muscles, nerves, arms, etc., whose productive capacity is manifested condensed as an immediate result of its application at a given time, but which has been developed beforehand in order to generate that productive capacity that now condenses in its performance. In other words, it is a consumption of mere human labor power that initially aimed, not at producing a use value external to the subject performing it, but at producing this very subject with the capacity to produce use values that can only be achieved in this way. Thus, in both cases, the qualitative difference between complex labor and simple labor is, in turn, reduced to a mere quantitative difference. And this difference is of an extensive nature, expressed in multiplicity, rather than the intensive character typical of enhancement. The unit of complex labor time is nothing but the condensation by

summation of the total units of labor, each one being a simple expenditure of human labor power, that have been expended to obtain the corresponding use value:[10]

> Complex work is nothing more than simple work enhanced or, rather, multiplied; thus, a small amount of complex work can be equivalent to a large amount of simple work (pp. 11-12).

In the representation of complex labor as value, the quantitative equality of the materiality of human bodily expenditure is imposed, so that it is manifested as reduced to a multiple of simple labor expended in a given time:

> No matter how complex the work that a commodity owes its existence to may be, the value immediately equates it to the product of simple labor, and as such, this value only

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[10] Given that the expression of complex labor is defined as the multiplication of the value of commodities with respect to the time spent in their immediate production, let us return to the differences in the intensity of labor and their effect on the determination of value. Painting a wall with fifty brushstrokes per minute is just as complex a task as painting it with twenty-five brushstrokes per minute, provided that the greater speed does not require a longer learning curve. As long as the greater speed is proportional to the consumption of labor power, that is, as long as it involves a proportionally greater amount of labor, both tasks are equally productive: the same amount of labor will have been expended to paint the wall. The only thing that qualitatively differentiates them is their intensity, that is, the pace at which the work is performed. If we now consider the matter not from the standpoint of the quantity of labor expended, but rather in terms of a given working time, it turns out that more intense labor yields a greater mass of use values in the same period of time. Since each of these embodies the same amount of abstract human labor performed privately and independently, its unit value remains unchanged; therefore, the mass of value produced in a given period of time is greater the more intense the labor performed. This difference in intensity is what we have already seen resolved in the determination of socially necessary labor time. Now, painting a wall with fifty brushstrokes per minute is a task that consumes a much smaller amount of human strength per unit of time than demolishing the same wall with fifty blows of a sledgehammer per minute. Therefore, it must be represented as a smaller mass of value than the latter. However, since the average labor power available to both producers is equal, the difference in expenditure of one per unit of time will tend to be compensated by the intensity with which each task can be performed. For example, if the labor time required to paint walls is determined by a normal intensity of fifty brushstrokes per minute, the time required to demolish walls will be determined by a normal intensity of twenty-five blows per minute. The expenditure of human labor power will thus tend to equalize per unit of time, thereby canceling the qualitative difference in question. If, on the other hand, due to its technical nature, a work process requires the condensation of the expenditure of the same common labor power into a shorter time, this labor power will be expended more quickly, that is, during a shorter workday. In this case, the greater intensity with which the expenditure is necessarily carried out due to the technical characteristics of a particular activity does not simply count as a general normal intensity in determining socially necessary labor time, but as an intensity normally located above the social average. In which case, the greater expenditure of condensed human labor power is represented as a greater value produced per unit of time. That is, the intensity required by a particular production, above the general social average, is represented as a greater amount of expenditure of the same quality of labor. Its effect on the value of commodities is thus formally similar to that of a difference in the complexity of labor.

> represents a certain amount of simple labor. The various proportions in which different kinds of labor are reduced to the unit of measure of simple labor are established through a social process that operates behind the backs of the producers... (pp. 11-12).

Let's note how it is here that Marx introduces a supposition for the first time in the development:

> From now on, for the sake of simplicity, we will always consider the labor force, whatever it may be, as a direct expression of simple labor, thus saving ourselves the trouble of reducing it to a unit (p. 12).

In dialectical knowledge, the assumption never fits as a starting point. On the contrary, it can only enter into the reproduction of the concrete through thought, as a result of this very development. The assumption is introduced once the necessity is discovered for a certain content to be realized in concrete forms whose magnitudes differ from its own. And it consists in considering these concrete forms as immediate expressions of the quantitative determination of the content. In this way, one can proceed with the qualitative development of the concrete forms in which the content is realized, without needing to interrupt each step to show that the quantitative difference in question is entirely foreign to it. Later, we will pause to examine the radically different role that the assumption plays in the representation and ideal reproduction of real concrete forms.

By immediately analyzing the commodity, the diversity of the rates at which one commodity exchanges for others indicated, in its form, the necessity of the existence of a common content of equal magnitude that is expressed in all of them. Now, the analysis of labor that produces commodities reveals the necessity for the discovered common content to realize its quantitative identity in this multiple expression:

> ... if in relation to use value the labor embodied in the commodity is only of qualitative interest, in relation to the magnitude of value it is only of quantitative interest, once reduced to the unit of simple, abstract human labor. In the first case, what matters is the type and quality of labor; in the second case, its quantity, its duration. And since the magnitude of value of a commodity only reflects the amount of labor contained in it, in certain determined proportions commodities will always necessarily represent equal values (pp. 12-13).

In the production of commodities, the dual character of labor is expressed most fully in the following contradiction:

> The greater the amount of use value, the greater, in itself, the material wealth [...]. However, it may happen that as material wealth grows, the amount of value it represents decreases. These contradictory fluctuations are explained by the dual nature of labor. Productive capacity is always, naturally, the productive capacity of useful, concrete labor.... The same labor, therefore, produces, in the same amount of time, the

> same quantity of value, no matter how much its productive capacity changes. On the other hand, it can yield different amounts of use values in the same time, greater or lesser depending on whether its productive capacity increases or decreases (p. 13).

Marx then synthesizes the specificity developed by the dual character of labor in commodity production:

> All labor is, on the one hand, an expenditure of human labor power in the physiological sense and, as such, as human labor in general or abstract human labor, it forms the value of the commodity. But all labor is, on the other hand, an expenditure of human labor power in a specific form and aimed at a purpose, and as such, as concrete and useful labor, it produces use-values (p. 13).

The analysis has shown that the labor producing commodities has the capacity to give its material product the purely social quality of exchangeability, because it is the generic expenditure of human labor consciously directed at transforming use-values, carried out in a socially useful manner by private producers independent of one another. In other words, up to this point it has identified the value of commodities as socially necessary abstract labor, both because it is normally required and because it is performed for others, materialized in them by independent private producers. But, having answered the question about the necessity of the commodity's exchangeability, the analysis merely leads to a new one: why does the materiality of socially necessary abstract labor, performed in a private and independent manner, have the capacity to turn the mere materiality of its product into a purely social representation? Or, in other words, why is it that, when carried out privately and independently, the generic expenditure of socially necessary human labor is represented as the exchangeability of the commodity, that is, as the form of value that it has?

Looking at the matter again from an external perspective considering our three bowls of soup, we now know that the slave and the father have expended in their production the same magnitude of muscles, brain, etc., as the restaurant cook. Thus, their bowls of soup are as much materializations of general human bodily expenditure applied to labor, that is, of abstract labor, and more specifically, of socially necessary abstract labor performed for others, as is his. But we also know that the labor performed by the slave for the benefit of his master and the father for the benefit of his child is powerless to produce value because those who perform it do not confront these beneficiaries as independent private producers. On the contrary, they are linked to the recipients of the use values they produce through the personal relationships of dependence directly established with them. One, through the power that his master can exert over him simply by being his master; the other, through the filial bond that ties him to his child, and only to him. In contrast, the restaurant cook does not personally care who sits to eat soup in his restaurant, as long as they pay the bill. They confront each other in their capacity as independent private producers with respect to one another. What is the content of the relationship they establish with each other when they exchange their commodities?

4.3 The form of value or exchange value

At first glance, it seems that there is no other place to confront the form of value that the commodity has than the commodity itself:

> ... if they are commodities, it is to embody a double meaning: that of useful objects and, at the same time, that of materializations of value. Therefore, they only appear as commodities, only take on the character of commodities, when they possess this dual form: their natural form and the form of value (p. 14).

However, no matter that the commodity comes into being as a value at the very moment when the socially necessary abstract labor embodied in it is performed privately and independently, that is, at the very moment of its production, the isolated commodity is incapable of manifesting itself as a materialization of value on its own:

> We can now take a commodity and turn it over in every way we want: as value, we will find that it is always elusive (p. 14).

Starting from the exteriority of the commodity, the analysis has uncovered the substance of its value. In turn, the analysis of this substance has revealed the private character of socially necessary labor as a condition for it to be defined as such a substance. But as soon as the analysis tries to deepen its penetration into the commodity in search of the necessity of this determination, it finds that there is no way to advance further. The analysis of the commodity has nothing more to say about its specificity. However, it is far from having led the investigation into a dead end, or, in other words, to the need to take its next step from outside the point reached so far.

First of all, from the very evidence that the analysis has reached its conclusion, it follows that the value of a commodity has no way of manifesting itself as the amount of socially necessary abstract labor performed privately and independently that is embodied in it. That is, it follows that this labor is the substance of the commodity's value, but it can never be the form in which it expresses itself. If it could be, it would be enough to look at the commodity for it to immediately show itself as such value, and not as an exchange value. Therefore, it is a substance that, by its own determination, carries the necessity of objectifying itself under a form distinct from itself.

Secondly, the analysis has not only highlighted the purely social materiality of value as it manifests itself in the negation of any qualitative material difference between value-producing labor, but it has also continued to advance to uncover it as it presents itself as the specific contradiction inherent in value-producing labor. Namely, by revealing the private condition of social labor (in its dual condition of being for others and having been realized in socially necessary time) that produces value and, therefore, the social condition of private labor that produces value. In doing so, it has shown that the exchange relationship is an indirect relationship between socially realized labor performed privately and independently, established through its products, and, therefore, a relationship of a social nature privately established.

Thus, the analysis has also shown that there is now no other course left for the investigation to follow except the development of the manifestation of that purely social materiality of value in the social relationship of some commodities with others. Therefore, the analysis of the commodity, and then of labor, has not come to an end just because it has been externally decided to declare it finished.[11] It has come to an end because it has revealed by itself that the answer regarding the necessity of the object that specifically drives it forward at this moment can only be uncovered by following a course opposite to that of the analysis itself. That is, by developing the expression of the content discovered so far, in its necessary form of realization. We have thus returned to the point from which we started in the analysis of exchange value, namely, to the exchange relationship of one commodity for another. But it is no longer a question of discovering the necessity of its content; rather, it is about developing the concrete form in which this necessity, which we now already know, is necessarily realized:

> ... commodities only become materialized as values insofar as they are an expression of the same social unity: human labor, which, therefore, their materiality as values is purely social, and [...] their materiality as values can only be revealed in the social relationship of commodities with one another. Indeed, in our investigation we began by studying the exchange value or exchange relation of commodities, to discover enclosed in this relation, their value. Now, we have no choice but to return once again to this form or manifestation of value (pp. 14-15).

It then corresponds to proceed with the development of the necessary form in which the value of commodities manifests itself as their capacity for exchange, that is, the development of the form of value or exchange value:

> By saying that goods, considered as values, are nothing more than crystallizations of human labor, our analysis reduces them to the abstraction of value, but without giving them a form of value different from the natural forms they assume. The situation changes when it comes to the expression of value of a commodity. Here, it is its own relationship with another commodity that reveals its character as value (p. 15).

The starting point for accompanying the development of the need for the value to manifest itself in its concrete form is the simplest expression of this form, namely, the exchange relationship of one commodity with another concrete and different one:

> In this simple form of value lies the secret of all forms of value. That is why it is in its analysis that the real difficulty resides (p. 15).

> Already in this simpler form, it becomes evident that the value of a commodity, that is,

[11] Resolution that, incidentally, could only be founded by appealing to the imposition of a logical, and therefore ideal, necessity, over the movement of research that has aimed to advance with no other guide than confronting the real necessity it encounters in its object.

the socially necessary abstract labor, private and independent, embodied in it, besides being expressed only in a relative manner, necessarily does so through the use value of another commodity that acts as its equivalent. At the same time, the appearance remains that the exchange relation does not contain any qualitative determination other than that of mere quantitative equality between its two poles. After the immediate manifestation of the equality relation, each of these fulfills a different role in it:

> Therefore, in the relationship or ratio of value in which the coat acts as the equivalent of the canvas, the coat form is considered as a form of value. The value of the commodity canvas is consequently expressed in the corporeal materiality of the commodity coat; or, in other words, the value of one commodity is expressed in the use value of another (p. 19).

Marx then points out the methodological specificity of reproducing real determination through thought; and how the commodity has moved from the apparent absolute externality in which it was initially placed to pointing to itself as the real subject whose development must ideally be accompanied:

> Therefore, everything that the analysis of the value of the commodity has already told us before is now repeated by the canvas itself when it comes into contact with another commodity, the frock coat. What happens is that the canvas expresses its ideas in its peculiar language, in the language proper to a commodity. To say that labor, considered in the abstract, as human labor, creates its own value, it tells us that the frock coat, in what it has in common with it or, it makes no difference, in what it has of value, is made up of the same labor as the canvas (p. 19).

This exchange relationship always occurs with its determined quantity:

> Therefore, the form of value cannot be limited to expressing value purely and simply, but must express a quantitatively determined value, an amount of value (p. 20).

Changes in the magnitude of value are not unequivocally manifested in this relative expression of value, nor do changes in this expression necessarily correspond to changes in the magnitude of the value of the commodity occupying the relative pole. This is mediated by the relationship between the changes in the value of the commodity that expresses its value and that of the one serving as the equivalent. And yet, this is the only form in which changes in the value of a commodity can express themselves:

> The relative value of commodity A, that is, its value expressed in terms of commodity B, increases and decreases, therefore, in direct proportion to the increase or decrease experienced by commodity A, as long as the value of the latter remains constant... with the value of commodity A remaining unchanged, its relative value, expressed in terms of commodity B, increases or decreases in inverse proportion to the value changes

> experienced by the latter... In this case [where the amounts of labor needed to produce the linen and the coat vary simultaneously in the same direction and in the same proportion], the equality, whatever changes their corresponding values may undergo, will remain the same... If the values of all commodities were to increase or decrease at the same time and in the same proportion, their relative values would remain unchanged. Their actual change in value would be revealed in the fact that in the same amount of labor, a generally greater or smaller quantity of commodities would be produced than before... As we can see, the actual changes that may occur in the magnitude of value are not unequivocally or completely reflected in its relative expression or in the magnitude of the relative value (pp. 20-21).

Every private labor is determined as part of social labor or as socially useless at the very moment it is performed. In the first case, the use value produced will have the capacity for exchange, the form of value, whereas in the second, it will lack that capacity and therefore this form.[12] But both conditions remain hidden, and are therefore indistinguishable, until the very moment when the use-values produced by social labor enter into the exchange relation expressing their relative value, while the use-values produced by socially useless labor manifest themselves as powerless to establish that relation.[13] Therefore, the commodity that is going to express its value relatively in the exchange relation will only reveal, in this same relation, that it

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[12] To leave no doubts, based on what has been seen so far, the products of labor that exceed what is socially necessary, whether qualitatively by producing socially useless objects or quantitatively by producing useful objects but in an amount that exceeds social need, appear as completely lacking the capacity for exchange. That is, they appear as if no social labor had been embodied in them at all. In other words, for now, commodities do not enter the exchange relationship as individual representatives of their class, but each one of them as an absolutely individual existence.

[13] This late manifestation forms the basis of the much-exploited inversion by vulgar economics, particularly Marxist economics, that it is the exchange relation itself that determines labor as socially useful or useless. It is not that the product becomes a commodity because it enters into the exchange relation, that is, that the product becomes a commodity the moment it successfully enters the market. Nor is it that, correspondingly, it loses this condition as soon as it leaves the market to enter the sphere of consumption. That is, that the commodity is only truly such in the fleeting moment of exchange, acquiring and exhausting its condition as such there. On the contrary, commodities are such the moment they are born as products of socially necessary labor performed privately and independently. Only by being products of this labor do they have the capacity to be exchanged, and only for that same reason do they have to be exchanged in order to manifest their condition as such products. Furthermore, commodities cannot lose their condition as such, that is, as materializations of socially necessary abstract labor performed privately and independently, throughout their natural life as useful objects. They carry this with them when they leave the market to enter the sphere of individual consumption as means of subsistence, or the sphere of productive consumption as means of production (in which case their value is preserved in the commodity produced through their use). Since their determination as commodities arises together with their use-value in the production process, that determination accompanies them before, during, and after passing through the market, as long as the material or moral existence of their use-values lasts. If, at this point, we return to our starting point, that 'immense accumulation of commodities,' we can see how we have begun to account for their necessity.

is the materialization of social labor and that, as such, it carries within itself the potential to be exchangeable. It will show that it has value because, by establishing its equality relation with the other, it will show that it is worth as much as the other; that is, that it embodies as much social labor as the other. Thus, just as the commodity that occupies the relative pole in the exchange relation will express that it indeed contains the potential for exchange when related to another that serves as its equivalent, the exchangeability of the latter will not present itself as a potential that needs to be manifested. At the moment when the product of a private labor manages to enter into an exchange relation with another, in which it expresses its value relatively, what it does is confirm that it has the capacity to attract a product of social labor that lies beyond the private control of the producer of the commodity in question. Then, the commodity that acts as an equivalent does not express in the exchange relation the confirmation of its own condition as a product of social labor, but rather enters it as a specific representative of social labor.[14] Its own exchangeability is not in question. Thus, the commodity that acts as an equivalent in the expression of another's value presents in this act an attribute in which the very essence of the commodity as a product of labor carried out privately and independently of one another appears to be negated:

> The equivalent form of a commodity is, therefore, the possibility of being directly exchanged for another commodity (p. 22).

The exchange relationship always embodies the expression of a given quantity of the value contained in the commodity that occupies the relative pole and, therefore, always involves the body of the commodity that takes the place of the equivalent in a given quantity:

> That a class of commodities, e.g., coats, serves as an equivalent to another class of commodities, e.g., linen; that consequently coats embody the characteristic property of being directly exchangeable for linen does not in any way indicate the proportion in which one can be exchanged for the other. This proportion depends, given the magnitude of the value of linen, on the magnitude of the value of coats. ... [[and this]] always corresponds to the amount of labor required for their production, thus being independent of the form that their value takes. But as soon as the class of commodities coats occupies the position of the equivalent in the expression of value, its magnitude of value does not manifest as such, but appears in the equality as a specific quantity of an object (p. 22).

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[14] As long as the producer of the commodity who acts as an equivalent participates in the exchange relationship, he does so as the private consciousness representing social labor, bearing on his own shoulders the consequences of having taken on such representation. That is, as a private and independent individual, he acts representing social labor at his own risk. If, once the exchange is completed, it turns out for any reason that the commodity which has been confirmed as such through his action has no use-value for him, two possibilities arise. Either he will have wasted his own labor materialized in the commodity that acted as the equivalent for himself (and, through himself, for society), or he will be responsible for ensuring that the received commodity once again manifests its condition as a bearer of social labor by attracting another commodity to confront it as a new equivalent in the exchange.

But however much it acts as an expression of the immediate possibility of change in a given magnitude, the commodity that occupies the position of equivalent in the exchange relation has no way of expressing in it the magnitude of its own value:

> ... the commodity [...] occupies the place of equivalent in the expression of value; its magnitude of value does not appear as such a magnitude of value, but rather figures in the equality as a certain quantity of an object ... the equivalent form of a commodity does not contain any quantitative determination of value (pp. 22-23).

The relative way in which the value of a commodity is expressed in another thus reveals to us the specific attributes of the form of equivalent. First of all:

> ... in it, the use-value becomes the form or expression of its antithesis, that is, of value. The natural form of the commodity thus becomes a form of value (p. 23).

This property of the form of equivalent is not substantiated, that is, it does not have an autonomous existence in the commodity whose body serves to express value, but is inseparable from the exchange relation itself:

> But it should be noted that this quid pro quo occurs only with regard to a commodity [...], within the value relation it has with any other commodity [...], solely and exclusively in this relation. Since no commodity can refer to itself as equivalent, nor therefore take its own natural sheath as an expression of its own value, it has no choice but to refer as equivalent to another commodity, taking the natural sheath of another commodity as its own form of value (p. 23).

However, it is the very form of the value relationship that creates the basis for the property acquired in it by the commodity occupying the equivalent pole to appear inverted, as if it sprang from the materiality of this commodity itself:

> By expressing its value essence as something perfectly distinct from its corporeal materiality and its physical properties, e.g., as something analogous to the coat, the relative form of value of a commodity, for example canvas, already suggests that this expression involves a social relation. Unlike what happens with the equivalent form, which consists precisely in the physical materiality of a commodity, such as the coat, this concrete object with its material properties expressing value, that is, possessing by virtue of its nature a form of value. Of course, this only occurs when this body is situated within the value relation in which the canvas commodity refers to the coat commodity as its equivalent. But since the properties of an object do not arise from its relation to other objects, as this relation merely confirms them,[15] it appears as if the coat owes its

[15] Let us note, in passing, how Marx once again brings to light here the course followed by any

> form of equivalent, that is, the property that makes it directly exchangeable, to nature, no more and no less than its property of being heavy or of retaining heat. Hence the mysterious character of the equivalent form, a character that the bourgeois-blunted view of the economist only notices when this form is already definitively materialized in money (p. 24).

By putting her body into expressing the value of one commodity in relation to the commodity that occupies the place of the equivalent, a new use-value is added to it in the exchange relation. Thus, the concrete labor that produced it has not only aimed at producing an object suitable as a means for human life, but has formally at the same time aimed at producing the immediate representation of abstract labor.

> In the expression of the value of the canvas, the utility of the tailor's work does not consist in making suits and therefore men, but in creating a body that tells us, just by looking at it, that it is value, and consequently a crystallization of labor materialized in the value of the canvas. To be able to create such a mirror of value, it is necessary that the tailor's work reflects absolutely nothing other than its abstract quality as human labor (p. 25).

But a use value can only function as an equivalent insofar as it is the product of a specific labor distinct from that which produced the commodity that expresses its value in a relative way in the exchange relationship:

> That is to say, the second characteristic of the equivalence form is that concrete labor here becomes a form or manifestation of its antithesis, that is, of abstract human labor (p. 25)

Although the commodity that takes the place of the equivalent can fulfill this role because it is the product of concrete labor and, therefore, like any commodity, as a product of private labor, in the exchange relation it simply appears as the expression of abstract labor whose product is immediately exchangeable for another. It thus appears as a direct expression of social labor:

> ... the third characteristic of the equivalence form! is that in it, private labor takes on the form of its antithesis, that is, labor in its directly social form (p. 25).

At this point, Marx emphasizes that the development carried out makes it evident by itself how the commodity was abstractly set as a starting point. He does this by contrasting the actual development with the two mutually opposing appearances that result from that

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determination and its realization necessarily expressed outwardly as a relationship between two concrete forms. The relationship always presupposes the existence of properties prior to itself that give rise to it; it is not possible, conversely, for the external establishment of the relationship between two forms lacking any properties that link them up to that point to generate this property by itself.

abstraction. First, by contrasting it with the appearance that the value of the commodity, that is, the socially necessary labor time materialized privately and independently in it, can manifest in an isolated commodity and, therefore, by itself. That is, by contrasting it with the appearance that value has no form other than its substance:

> ... the value of a commodity is expressed independently when we represent it as 'exchange value.' At the beginning of this chapter, we said—following traditional language—that a commodity is use-value and exchange-value. Strictly speaking, this statement is false. From the moment its value takes on a form of its own, distinct from its natural form, the commodity reveals this dual aspect of itself, but it never takes on that form if we consider it in isolation: for that, we must place it in a value or exchange relationship with another commodity (p. 27).

Secondly, it opposes the development carried out to the appearance that the value of the commodity has no substance beyond its form, its exchange value:

> ... Our analysis has shown that the form of value or the expression of the value of a commodity arises from the very nature of its value, and not the other way around, the value and the magnitude of value of its mode of expression as exchange value (p. 27).

In turn, it has become evident that the different role played by the use-value of commodities in the exchange relation does not arise from it by itself, but is a necessary expression of the determination of the commodity as a use-value that embodies value:

> Therefore, the internal antithesis between use-value and value contained in the commodity takes shape in an external antithesis, that is, in the relationship between two commodities, of which one, the one whose value tries to be expressed, is of interest directly only as a use-value, while the other, in which the value is expressed, is of interest directly only as an exchange value. The simple form of a commodity's value is, therefore, the simple form in which the antithesis of use-value and value contained in it is manifested (pp. 27-28).

Thus, by contrasting the initial exteriority and its appearances with the development carried out, Marx only emphasizes the necessity of the starting point as such:

> The product of labor is a usable object in all types of society; only in a historically given period of progress, one that sees in the labor invested in producing a usable object a 'materialized' property of this object, that is, its value, does the product of labor become a commodity. From this, it follows that the simple form of a commodity's value is at the same time the simple commodity form of the product of labor; therefore, the development of the commodity form coincides with the development of the value form (p. 28).

Up to this point, the commodity that acts as an equivalent is only a mere form of expressing value in the concrete exchange relationship it establishes with another likewise determined distinct commodity, but this is far from generally revealing what determines value itself, namely, the general character of labor represented in the value of the commodity:

> At first glance, it is already apparent how insufficient the simple form of value is[...] Its expression in any commodity, in commodity B, does nothing more than differentiate the value of commodity A from its own use-value; it does, therefore, nothing more than place it in a relation of exchange with any class of commodities other than itself, instead of revealing its qualitative equality and quantitative proportionality with all other commodities. To the simple and relative form of the value of a commodity corresponds the concrete form of equivalence (of another... or form of direct exchangeability in relation to this special class of commodity... (p. 28).

However, it is the very simple form of value itself that seems to carry within it the need, albeit purely formal, to generalize.

> ... The simple form of value traces back by itself to more complex forms. Through this form, the value of a commodity [...] can only be expressed, undoubtedly, in a commodity of another kind. What kind of commodity this other one is [...] is irrelevant. Consequently, depending on whether that commodity is involved in a value relationship with this or that class of commodities, we have different simple expressions of the same commodity's value. [...] Its simple expression thus turns into a constantly expandable series of various simple expressions of value (p. 28).

The simple expression of the relative value of a commodity is now recognized as a singular moment of the total or developed form of the relative value of that commodity. Thus, the general character of the labor represented in the value of the commodity is presented as such in the very form of the exchange relation:

> The value of a commodity, [...] is now expressed in other innumerable elements of the world of commodities. This is where it becomes truly evident that this value is nothing more than the crystallization of undifferentiated human labor. Indeed, value-creating labor is now explicitly represented as labor comparable to any other human labor, regardless of the specific form it takes [...] As can be seen, its form of value now relates the canvas, not to a particular kind of commodity, but to the world of commodities in general. Considered as a commodity, the canvas acquires citizenship within this world. At the same time, the infinite series of its expressions indicates that the value of commodities is indifferent to the specific form of use value it may take (p. 29).

The very formal development of the relative expression of value thus highlights the seemingly casual nature of the exchange relationship when it was first encountered, an appearance that at that time could only be overcome analytically:

> The value of the linen is always the same, whether it is expressed [...] in countless different commodities, belonging to the most diverse owners. The casual nature of the relationship between two individual owners of commodities has disappeared. Now, it is evident that the magnitude of a commodity's value is not regulated by exchange; on the contrary, exchange is regulated by the magnitude of the commodity's value (p. 29).

But the general character of the work represented in the equivalent does not go beyond being able to manifest itself through the endless set of all simple expressions of the relative value of the same commodity and, therefore, in the endless set of the products of other concrete labors. It lacks a synthetic expression:

> Now, the concrete natural form of each of these commodities is a form of equivalence/given, alongside many others. And the same applies to the various kinds of useful, concrete, determined labor contained in the various material commodities: they only matter as specific forms of realization or manifestation of human labor in general... Just as the natural form of each concrete type of commodity is a determined form of equivalence alongside countless others, there exist only restricted forms of equivalence, each of which excludes the others. And the same applies to the kind of useful, concrete, determined labor contained in each special equivalent of commodities: it is only a special form, and therefore incomplete, of human labor. Of course, human labor has its total or complete form of manifestation in the set of all those specific forms, but it does not possess a single, complete form in which it is revealed to us (p. 30).

When displaying the concrete forms of developed capital, it becomes evident that it carries within itself the necessity of its own formal inversion, where all commodities, except one, express their relative value in it. Thus:

> First of all, commodities now express their values in a simple way, since they express it in a single commodity, and secondly, they express it in a unique way, for they all express it in the same commodity. Their form of value is simple and common to all; it is, therefore, general (p. 31).

Marx points out here how these forms of expressing the value of commodities in the capitalist mode of production, which still appear as abstract since they are only known as a product of the formal development of the exchange relationship, correspond to concrete forms that have been presented by the historical development of the commodity. It is, therefore, an observation introduced externally to the very course of dialectical knowledge that is unfolding. As such, at this point, it has no greater significance than being a mere circumstantial illustration:

> The first [the simple form][...] appeared only with a practical character in very primitive times, when the products of labor were transformed into commodities through occasional and episodic acts of exchange. ... The developed form of value begins to

> present itself in reality from the moment when a product of labor, livestock for example, is regularly exchanged[...] for various other commodities (p. 31).

In contrast to the exteriority of the previous observation, the formal inversion that has been applied to the general relative form of value begins to show the true content expressed in it. It starts to do so in a correspondingly formal manner:

> Now, such a value of each commodity, considered as something equal to the canvas, is not only distinct from its own use value, but from all use value in general, which is precisely what allows it to express itself as what it has in common with all commodities. This form is, therefore, what actually relates and connects all commodities as values, what makes them manifest as exchange values relative to one another (p. 32).

And this formal mediation of the commodity, which occupies the place of the equivalent in the general form of value, in itself demonstrates the social character of the relationship embodied in the expression of value:

> In both cases [the two previous forms], it was, so to speak, the exclusive concern of each commodity to give itself a form of value, its own task, which it accomplished without the cooperation of the other commodities; these were limited to playing with it the purely passive role of equivalents. This is not the case with the general form of value, which arises through the joint work of the entire world of commodities. A commodity can only acquire a general expression of value if at the same time all the others express their value in the same equivalent, and each new type of commodity that appears necessarily has to follow the same path. This reveals that the materialization of the value of commodities, being the mere 'social existence' of these objects, can only be expressed through their social relation with all the others; therefore, its form of value must, necessarily, be a form that is socially governed (p. 32).[16]

The need for the universality of relative expressions of value to have a general expression highlights a particular use value as such a general expression:

> The general relative form of value of the world of commodities imparts to the commodity singled out by it as equivalent, to the canvas, the character of general equivalent. Its proper natural form is the common value configuration of this entire world of commodities, and this is what allows the canvas to be directly exchanged for any other commodity (pp. 32-33).

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[16] Let us note that, up to this point, the need for the existence of the general equivalent appears without any reason other than the formal development of the relative expression of the value of commodities in the exchange relation. The real necessity for the existence of the general equivalent will only be able to become evident when the real necessity expressed in the exchange relation is developed, that is, when the unfolding of the exchange process itself is achieved.

It is now the development of the commodity itself that reveals what previously could only be discovered through the analysis of the labor producing commodities, namely, that abstract labor is not determined as such by merely abstracting from the attributes of concrete labor, but as general expenditure of human muscles and brains. The expenditure of human brains and muscles carried out in the concrete form corresponding to the production of the commodity that serves as the general equivalent is manifested as materially equal to that required to produce any other commodity in which its relative value is expressed:

> The corporeal form of the cloth is considered as a visible embodiment, like the general attire that clothingly covers all human labor within society. Textile labor, that is, the private labor that produces the cloth, is at the same time bound up in a social form of a general character, in a form of equality with all other labor. The countless equations that make up the general form of value successively equate the labor embodied in the cloth with each of the labors contained in other commodities, thereby converting textile labor into the general form of manifestation of human labor, whatever it may be. In this way, labor materialized in the value of commodities is not represented merely in a negative way, as labor in which all concrete forms and useful qualities of actual labor are abstracted, but in doing so we also explicitly highlight its own positive character. What is done is to reduce all actual labor to the character of human labor common to all of them, to the expending of human labor power. [[The 'we highlight', 'what we do' are inversions by Roces, who thinks that because he says 'represents' he is referring to what consciousness does in the form of representation; the one that represents, the one that is highlighted, the one that 'reduces', that is, the subject of all the sentences which are a single one in the original, is labor. It should be read: '... but in doing so it highlights, explicitly, its own positive character. What it does is reduce all actual labor to the character of human labor common to all of them, to the expending of human labor power.'; JIC]] (p. 33).

In the general form expressed by the concept of value, the restoration to the outside of the unity between individual labor and social labor has thus been completed, in essence. In it, the former manifests itself as what it is, the necessary concrete form in which the latter is realized.

The productive powers of labor are always productive powers of social labor, expressed in the form of the productive powers of concrete individual labors. Thus, changes in the scope of the social character of labor are reflected in the changes experienced by its concrete forms throughout history. The greater this scope, the richer and more varied these concrete forms become. But within commodity production, concrete individual labors only manifest themselves by themselves, that is, in their execution, as private labors. They cannot do so as social labor. Therefore, the social character of concrete labors is manifested in a historically specific way only insofar as these concrete labors have in common at any historical time, that is, in being expenditures of human labor power in general, the performance of abstract human labor. And only to the extent that this labor has already been performed, that is, already materialized in its product:

> The general form of value, a form in which the products of labor appear as mere crystallizations of undifferentiated human labor, demonstrates by its very structure that it is the social expression of the world of commodities. And it simultaneously reveals that, within this world, it is the general and human character of labor that gives it its specifically social character (p. 33).

The general equivalent appears by synthesizing in itself the powers that other commodities lack. But, however independently it may seem thus determined, its development has been parallel to that of the relative form of value. Moreover, it has not even been the subject of its own genesis:

> The degree of development of the relative form of value corresponds to the degree of development of the equivalent form. But great care must be taken to note that the development of the equivalent form is nothing more than the expression and result of the development of the relative form of value (p. 33).

However, it is precisely from that development that the apparent autonomy of the general equivalent has emerged:

> But to the same extent that the form of value in general develops, the antithesis between its two poles also develops, between the relative form of value and the form of equivalence. (p. 33)

The development of this contradiction has two complete expressions. First, the full development of the exchangeability of commodities, their determination as social objects, is only achieved on the condition that all of them deny their immediate exchangeability, elevating one alone as its representation:

> Finally, the last form, Form III [the general form of value], impresses upon the world of commodities the general-social relative form of value, since all the commodities that constitute it, with the exception of a single one, remain outside the form of general equivalent. It is a single commodity, [...], that assumes [...], the form of an object directly exchangeable for all the others, that presents a directly social form, since all the others are prevented from doing so (p. 34).

Secondly, the commodity that represents immediate exchangeability cannot express its own relative value in general, but must do so through the never-ending series of all other commodities:

> In turn, the commodity that appears as a general equivalent is excluded from the unique relative form and therefore from the general form of the value of the world of

> commodities... its value is expressed in a relative way in the infinite series of all other material commodities (pp. 34-35).

Although the expression of value has reached the full development of its essential determinations, it still contains a final potential. The condition of the commodity as the exclusive form of the general equivalent imposes the necessity of its fixation in a concrete commodity:

> The form of general equivalent is a form of value in the abstract. It can therefore fall upon any commodity. On the other hand, a commodity only occupies the position corresponding to the form of general equivalent (form III) as long as all the other commodities reveal it from within as the equivalent. Until the moment when this operation is definitively realized in a specific and determined class of commodities, the single and relative form of value of the world of commodities does not acquire objective firmness or general validity within society (p. 35).

This fixation determines the commodity as a concrete expression of the general equivalent, as money whose use value derives from that very function of becoming the immediate representative of social labor. More specifically, it is the concrete determination of the use value produced by private labor, considered as the consolidated expression of the general equivalent of the value of the remaining commodities and, as such, the immediate representative of the socially necessary abstract labor materialized in the commodities:

> ... the specific class of commodities into whose natural form the social form of equivalent is incorporated, is the one that becomes commodity-money or functions as money. This commodity has a specific social function, and therefore a social monopoly within the world of commodities, to perform the role of general equivalent. This privileged position was historically conquered by a particular commodity [...]: gold (p. 35).

Up to this point, the formal generalization and inversion of the relative expression of value advanced by revealing essential developments of it. The same does not happen with the transformation of the abstract general equivalent into money. Although this transformation is a product of the necessity of the commodity world to express its relative value, it is nothing more than a formal change that pertains in itself to the general equivalent:

> The transition from Form I (simple form) to Form II and from this to Form III entails substantial changes. In contrast, Form IV is not distinguished from Form III except in that here it is gold that comes to replace the canvas in its role as the form of general equivalent. ... The progress consists purely and simply in that now the form of direct and general exchangeability, that is, the form of general equivalent, becomes definitively attached, by the force of social habit, to the specific natural form of the commodity gold (pp. 35-36).

But with this formal development of the general equivalent, it is now the relative expression of the value of commodities that undergoes the corresponding formal change, acquiring the concrete form of price:

> The simple and relative expression of the value of a commodity [...] in that other commodity which already functions as money-commodity, e.g., in gold, is the price form (p. 36).[17]

Let us note that, up to this point, price appears as an immediate attribute of each individual commodity, independent of the mass of those of its kind, as can be demonstrated by analyzing a commodity and developing the expression of its value. At the same time, let us note how, in dialectical knowledge, the definition can only emerge as the result that synthesizes a development, never as its starting point.

We have thus traced the development of the determinations of the commodity until revealing it as a use-value that, as the materialization of socially necessary abstract labor required to produce it, which has been performed privately, possesses the social capacity to relate to its counterparts in exchange. That is, it is a use-value in which the socially necessary abstract labor time materialized privately and independently in it is represented as an aptitude inherent to that very object for exchange—its value—and is necessarily expressed in the act of exchange, that is, as exchange value, in an amount of the material body of another. What Marx has already expressed in a condensed form in his drafts:

> ... value is not only the interchangeable nature of a commodity in general, but the specific interchangeability of commodities. Value is at the same time the expression of the proportion in which one commodity is exchanged for another, and the expression of [...] (embodied labor); it is their quantitatively determined interchangeability... Value is its social relation, its economic quality.[18]

> The exchange value of a thing is nothing but the quantitatively specified expression of its capacity to serve as a means of exchange.[19]

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[17] Logical representation necessarily starts from a concept or category, that is, from a definition. In contrast, the dialectical method can only begin with the immediate observation of the concrete itself. In this method, the definition has no other role than as a point of arrival that synthesizes the development carried out, from which it is inseparable.

[18] Karl Marx, Fundamental Elements for the Critique of Political Economy (draft) 1857-1858, Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 1971, vol. 1, pp. 65-66.

[19] Ibid. p. 134.

4.4 The fetishism of the commodity, and its secret

The social relationship of commodities goes so far that they have the power to separate one from the other, elevating it as the unique and immediate general expression of its exchange capacity. From beginning to end, it is, certainly, a very unnatural attribute for an object simply suited to satisfy the needs of the material process of human life:

> A commodity appears at first sight an extremely obvious, trivial thing. But its analysis brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties. (p. 36).

The development of the determinations of the value form is presented, at this stage of the investigation, as coming into conflict with its own starting point. This starting point was nothing else but discovering which power of social labor, carried out under the concrete form of private labor, is realized in the exchange relation of commodities. And private labor was that whose what and how to produce was determined solely by the consciousness of its individual performer. Therefore, in the organization of the social labor of independent private producers, there could seem to be no mediation other than the exercise of their free will. In other words, the most general social relation established among independent private producers seemed to be unable to be subjected to the dominion of any power external to that free will itself. However, in developing the value form that the material product of this free labor takes, we discover that the ability to distinguish which private labor integrates social labor and which does not is completely beyond the reach of the consciousness of its performers. As we have already seen, they can turn a commodity over and over as they like, and still not discover in it whether it is the product of social labor or of socially useless labor. On the contrary, the ability in question confronts the free will of commodity producers as an attribute that pertains exclusively to the exchange relation established among their products as materializations of equal amounts of abstract labor, whether this relation pleases their consciousness or not. Moreover, the consciousness of commodity producers is immediately confronted by social labor as a power so external to itself that it finds it embodied in a certain quantity of the material body of a commodity that the general exchange of commodities has distinguished as the general equivalent of all of them.

The exchange relation between commodities has shown no more specific root than the private character with which social labor is realized in the capitalist mode of production. Therefore, it has been shown to arise from the power that independent private producers have to exercise full voluntary control over their individual labor processes. In other words, the exchange relation is nothing more than the concrete form in which the powers generated by the exercise of one's own free consciousness in the organization of individual labor are realized; it is, in itself, a power of this exercise. But it turns out that, as long as it enters into the exchange relation, the commodity stands before that same consciousness that generated it as a power external to it. The material product generated through free voluntary control over individual labor confronts this capability of control as the bearer of an autonomous social power generated by the exchange relation itself. The full development of the value form of commodities does

nothing but carry us beyond itself, to place us before the way in which the consciousness of commodity producers faces its own product as a social power inherent in its material product. It is now, therefore, a matter of discovering the necessity of this alienated form under which commodities present themselves to the consciousness of their producers:

> Where, then, does the mysterious character of the product of labor come from, as soon as it takes the form of a commodity? (p. 37).

Marx first points out why it cannot be based on their nature as use values, on their usefulness for human life. Any product of human labor that satisfies a need is a use value, but commodities are the only use values capable of relating to each other in exchange:

> So far as it is a use-value, there is nothing mysterious about it, whether we consider it from the point of view that by its properties it satisfies human needs, or that it first takes on these properties as the product of human labour. It is absolutely clear that, by his activity, man changes the forms of the materials of nature in such a way as to make them useful to him. The form of wood, for instance, is altered if a table is made out of it. Nevertheless, the table continues to be wood, an ordinary, sensuous thing. But as soon as it emerges as a commodity, it changes into a thing which transcends sensuousness. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than if it were to begin dancing of its own free will.

Since socially necessary abstract labor is the substance represented in the exchangeability of commodities, and therefore the one that determines their value, the disregard for use-value seems to point directly to it. But socially necessary abstract labor itself cannot be the cause of exchangeability, nor, therefore, of the supernatural appearance of commodities. Every product of socially useful human labor is a materialization of this labor, but only social use-values that are distinguished from others by being commodities possess the attribute of being exchangeable as equivalents:

> As we can see, the mystical character of the commodity does not arise from its use value. But nor does it arise from the content of its value determinations. Firstly, because no matter how different the useful labors or productive activities may be, it is an incontrovertible physiological truth that all these activities are functions of the human organism and that each of them, whatever their content and form, represents an essential expenditure of the human brain, nerves, muscles, senses, etc. Secondly, regarding the magnitude of value and what serves to determine it, that is, the length of time of that expenditure or the amount of labor invested, it is evident that the quantity is even distinguished through the senses from the quality of the labor. The time of labor necessary to produce one's means of subsistence had to be of concern to humans in all eras, even if it did not interest them equally in the various phases of their development. Finally, as soon as humans work for each other, in any way they do, their labor assumes

a social form (p. 37).

Far from leading to a dead end, this double analytical discard shows that there is only one place to go to seek the reason for the appearance of the autonomous subject that the commodity presents. And this place is its very form as such. It turns out that the exchange capacity of commodities, their capacity to relate socially with each other, is nothing more than the reflection, inverted as a natural attribute of commodities, of the relationship that exists between their producers as individual organs of social production. That is, the inverted reflection of the general organization through which society allocates the material potential of its members' bodies to produce social use-values, or their total labor capacity, under the various concrete useful forms of it to be realized by each individual:

> Where does, then, the mysterious character that the product of labor presents as soon as it takes the form of a commodity come from? It evidently comes from this very form. In commodities, the equality of human labor takes on the material form of an equal objectification of the value of labor products, the extent to which human labor power is expended, measured by the time of its duration, takes on the form of the magnitude of value of labor products, and finally, the relations between different producers, relations in which the social function of their labor is expressed, take the form of a social relationship between the products of their labor themselves. The mysterious character of the commodity form therefore lies entirely and simply in the fact that it projects before humans the social character of their labor as if it were a material characteristic of the products of their labor, a social natural gift of these objects, and as if, therefore, the social relationship that mediates between producers and the collective labor of society were a social relationship established between the objects themselves, independently of their producers. This quid pro quo is what turns labor products into commodities, into physically metaphysical objects or into social objects.... the commodity form and the value relationship of the products of labor in which this form takes shape have absolutely nothing to do with their physical character nor with the material relations derived from this character. What here, in the eyes of humans, takes on the phantasmagoric form of a relationship between material objects is nothing more than a concrete social relationship established between the humans themselves. That is why, if we want to find an analogy to this phenomenon, we must go back to the nebulous regions of the world of religion, where the products of the human mind appear as beings endowed with life of their own, with independent existence, and related among themselves and with humans. The same happens in the world of commodities with the products of human hands. This is what I call the fetishism under which the products of labor present themselves as soon as they are created in the form of commodities and which is therefore inseparable from this mode of production (pp. 37-38).

The answer to the initial question immediately leads to the following: Where does the specificity of the general social relationship between commodity producers come from, that is, from the allocation of social labor under its various concrete forms in a commodity society,

which makes this process take on the inverted form of a social relationship between material objects? The answer to this question is already implicit in the answer to the previous one. The specificity of the social relationship between commodity producers lies in the fact that they come into contact with each other, not as the expression of an immediate social power of their own, but as the expression of the exclusion from this collective power, that is, as private producers independent of one another:

> This fetishistic character of the world of commodities corresponds, as the previous analysis has already shown, to the genuine and peculiar social character of the labor that produces commodities. If useful objects take the form of commodities, it is simply because they are the products of private labor, independent of one another. The sum of these private labors constitutes the collective labor of society (p. 38)

And it is in exchange where the social attribute carried by commodities, their value, becomes evident, taking the objectified form of exchange value, as a social relation of equality between things:

> As producers come into social contact by exchanging the products of their labor with one another, it is natural that the specifically social character of their private labor only becomes apparent through this exchange. We could also say that private labor only functions as links in the collective labor of society through the relations that exchange establishes between the products of labor and, through them, between the producers. Therefore, for the producers, the social relations established between their private labors appear as what they are; that is, not as directly social relations between people in their labor, but as material relations between people and social relations between things. It is in the act of exchange that the products of labor take on a material form of socially equal value, independent of their multiple and diverse physical materialities as useful objects... The private labors of producers thus assume, in fact, a double social character. On the one hand, considered as concrete useful labor, they necessarily have to satisfy a certain social need and fit, therefore, into the collective labor of society, into the basic system of the social division of labor. But, on the other hand, they will only be capable of satisfying the multiple needs of their own producers to the extent that each one of these private and concrete useful labors can be exchanged for any other useful private labor, or in other words, to the extent that it represents an equivalent of it. To find such an equality among diverse labors, one must necessarily abstract from their real inequality, reducing them to the characteristic common to all of them as the expenditure of human labor power, as abstract human labor (pp. 38-39).

Commodity producers are free individuals, that is, they are not subject to anyone's personal domination in the individual use of their labor power. But, lacking in this way any direct personal link in the organization of their social labor, they must carry it out privately and independently. Therefore, they have no control over the social powers of their labor. These social powers then appear to them as inverted, as a social attribute of the products of their

private labor. The capacity to relate socially does not belong to the producers; instead, it is an attribute alien to them: an attribute of their commodity. Consequently, they must put their consciousness and will as free individuals at the service of the production of this social attribute that is alien to them; they must produce value. In order to consume as persons, that is, to consume use-values produced by human labor, they first have to act as personifications, as living consciousness and will, of the social powers of their commodity. Therefore, their free consciousness is the concrete form in which their alienated consciousness is realized in the commodity. Conversely, they are only free individuals, that is, not subject to anyone's personal domination, because they organize the allocation of the total labor power of society under its various concrete forms, made individually useful through the exchange of commodities. That is, they owe their condition as individuals bearing free consciousness to their condition as individuals bearing alienated consciousness.

Let us notice how in his drafts, Marx has already highlighted, although not following the development of the determinations of the commodity, but in a direct manner, the specificity of the relations between independent private producers, which defines them as mutually free individuals:

> The reduction of all products and all activities to exchange value presupposes both the dissolution of all rigid personal (historical) relations of dependence in production, as well as the general reciprocal dependence of producers. Not only does the production of each individual depend on the production of all the others, but the transformation of their product into personal means of subsistence also comes to depend on the consumption of everyone else.
> ... The mutual and widespread dependence of individuals who are mutually indifferent constitutes their social bond. This social bond is expressed in the exchange value, and only in this does one's own activity or product become for each individual an activity or product for the same individual. The individual must produce a universal product: the exchange value [...] His social power, as well as his connection to society, he carries with him in his pocket.
> … Each individual possesses social power in the form of a thing. If this social power is taken from the thing, it would have to be given to people over people.[20]

If we consider one last time the example of the three soup producers, we can now see the following. The slave's ability to work for the benefit of his master, that is, to perform the social labor that he specifically must perform, is directly assigned under its various concrete forms by the master's will. The father's ability to produce use-values for his child is likewise directly assigned by the filial relationship. But the restaurant chef can only make the soup without knowing whether this particular mode, under which he has independently assigned the portion of the total capacity of society to perform labor that he embodies, that is, whether the private labor he has done is part of socially useful labor or not. Only if the bowl of soup he has produced realizes its exchange value, that is, effectively relates to another commodity in

[20] Marx, Foundations for the Critique of Political Economy (draft) 1857-1858, op. cit., pp. 83-85

exchange, will the chef have fulfilled his general social relation, thereby demonstrating that his private labor was, at the same time, social labor.

Above all, this inverted social relationship is presented to the consciousness of the individuals who produce it, insofar as they are simply determined as producers of commodities, that is, as a reflection of the inverted social relationship in their immediate consciousness:

> The brain of private producers is limited to reflecting this double social character of their private work in the ways revealed in practice by the market, the exchange of products [...]. Therefore, men do not relate the products of their labor to each other as values because these objects seem to them merely material wrappers of an equal human labor. It is the other way around. By equating each other in exchange, as values, their various products, what they are doing is equating their various labors with each other, as forms of human work. They do not know it, but they do it. Therefore, value does not have written on its forehead what it is. Far from it, it turns all products of labor into social hieroglyphs. Then men come and strive to decipher the meaning of these hieroglyphs, to discover the secret of their own social product, for it is evident that conceiving useful objects as values is their social labor, nothing more and nothing less than language. The late scientific discovery that the products of labor, considered as values, are nothing more than material expressions of the human labor invested in their production, is a discovery that marks an era in the history of human progress, but it does not dispel, far from it, the material shadow that accompanies the social character of labor. And what only has reasons to exist in this specific form of production, in the production of commodities, namely: that the specifically social character of independent private labors lies in what they share as forms of human labor, taking the form of the value character of the products of labor, remains for the minds trapped in the network of commodity production, even after that discovery, something as perennial and definitive as the thesis that the scientific decomposition of air into its elements leaves the form of air as a physical material form untouched (pp. 39-40).

Marx then sets out the determination of the path followed by the necessary development of this immediate consciousness into scientific consciousness of the inverted social relationship. For the consciousness of each commodity producer is limited to organizing their own individual labor, while at the same time being deprived of interfering in the organization of the individual labor of others. But the consciousness of the social potential of one's own individual labor in relation to that of others is a necessary moment in the organization of this labor, whatever the specific social form in which it is realized. Deprived of direct relation with others, the commodity producer can only produce this consciousness through the ideal anticipation of the place their commodity will occupy in the world of commodities when it reaches circulation. A place that is expressed synthetically in the potential price at which the commodity will be able to be sold:

> What primarily concerns those who exchange some products for others is to know how

> many foreign products they will obtain in return for their own, that is, in what proportions products will be exchanged for one another. As soon as these proportions acquire, through the force of habit, a certain fixity, it seems as if they arise from the very nature inherent in the products of labor; as if, for example, 1 ton of iron embodied the same value as 2 ounces of gold, just as 1 pound of gold and 1 pound of iron contain an equal weight, despite their different physical and chemical properties. In reality, the value character of labor products is only consolidated when they function as quantities of value. These change constantly, without the intervention of the will, prior knowledge, or the actions of the people among whom the exchange takes place. Their own social movement appears to them as the movement of things under their control, instead of them controlling the things. It is necessary for commodity production to develop in its entirety for the scientific consciousness to emerge from experience itself, recognizing that private labors, carried out independently of one another, although maintaining a relationship of mutual interdependence in all respects, as elementary links in the social division of labor, can be constantly reduced to their social proportion, because in the chance and ever-fluctuating proportions of exchange of their products, the socially necessary labor time for their production always asserts itself as a regulating natural law, just as the law of gravity imposes itself when a house falls on someone. The determination of the magnitude of value by labor time is, therefore, the secret hidden behind the apparent fluctuations of the relative values of commodities. The discovery of this secret destroys the appearance of purely accidental determination of the value magnitudes of labor products but does not destroy, far from it, their material form (p. 40).

Political economy starts from the practical culmination of common knowledge on the subject, as an expression of the need to go beyond the scope of that knowledge regarding the concrete forms in which it operates. And this need only arises when the development of change has reached such complexity and extent that the commodity form, that is, the exchangeability of use values, already appears as a general, and therefore, natural attribute of them. Political economy does not inherently carry the necessity to account for the reason for this form, nor, much less, for its historical character. Its starting point is, naturally, the analysis of commodity prices in order to find the determinants of their magnitude:

> The reflection on the forms of human life, including therefore its scientific analysis, generally follows a path opposite to the actual course of things. It begins post festum and therefore starts from the pre-established results of the historical process. The forms that turn the products of labor into commodities and that, naturally, presuppose their circulation, already possess the firmness of natural forms of social life before men strive to explain not the historical character of these forms, which they already consider something immutable, but their content. Thus, it is understood that it was simply the analysis of commodity prices that led men to investigate the determination of the magnitude of value, and the collective expression of commodities in money that prompted them to establish their value character. But this finished form of the

> commodity world—the money form—far from revealing the social character of private labor and, therefore, the social relations between private producers, actually conceals them. It is precisely these forms that constitute the categories of bourgeois economics. They are mental forms accepted by society, and therefore objective, in which the conditions of production of this historically given social production regime—the production of commodities—are expressed (pp. 40-41).

Marx shows how the historical nature of the variability of use-values becomes evident merely by analyzing other ways in which social production is regulated:

> ... all the mysticism of the world of commodities, all the charm and mystery that surround the products of labor based on commodity production vanish as soon as we move them to other forms of production (p. 41).

Marx first advances within the paradigm of the individually abstractly independent from bourgeois ideology represented by Robinson, and then on the form that the general regulation of social life actually takes in societies based on direct relationships between people. He shows how in each of these societies the production of social use-values, concrete labor, and socially necessary abstract labor are present. But what is never present, nor has any way or need to be present, is the condition of producers being private and independent, nor, therefore, private labor. Individual labor is carried out there immediately as a specific portion of the society's total labor, that is, it is immediately social:

> Therefore, whatever judgment we may have of the documents here depicting men in relation to one another, the fact is that the social relations of people in their work are revealed as their personal relations, without being disguised as social relations between things, between the products of their work (p. 42).

The same occurs, but now beyond the regulation of social life through direct relationships between people, as they associate as free individuals, that is, as conscious individuals above any appearance of their determination as immediate organs of their social powers. That is, in

> ... an association of free men who work with collective means of production and who deploy their numerous individual labor powers, with full awareness of what they are doing, as a great social labor force (p. 43).

Of course, the necessity of this form of production, which has full awareness of its own individual determination as the immediate incarnation of the powers of social labor in the form of organizing itself, can only present itself at this stage of commodity development in a way completely external to this development itself and, consequently, as the abstract possibility of its negation. At the same time, it becomes evident that the discovery of the real necessity of this negation cannot arise from historical analysis itself, but from the unfolding through thought of

the historical potential contained in the very general social relation to be negated, and therefore, in the commodity as a product of social labor carried out in a private manner:

> ... The form of the social process of life, or in other words, of the material process of production, will only shed its mystical halo when that process becomes the work of freely socialized men and placed under their conscious and rational control. But for this, society will need to have a material base or a series of material conditions of existence, which are, in turn, the natural result of a long and arduous evolution (p. 44).

But just as the analysis of other forms of social production highlights the historical nature of commodity production, it turns out that in political economy everything is made to represent those other societies by imposing on them the forms specifically characteristic of commodity production:

> Nor does Ricardo lack the customary Robinsonian image. "He immediately describes the primitive fisherman and hunter by showing them exchanging their fish and game as owners of commodities, according to the proportion of labor time embodied in these exchange values. And he falls into the anachronism of presenting his primitive hunter and fisherman calculating the value of their tools of labor using the annuity tables commonly employed in 1817 at the London Stock Exchange. The 'parallelograms of Mr. Owen' seem to be the only form of society this author knows, outside of the bourgeois one" (p. 41).

The evidence of the determination of political economy as a science formally belonging to bourgeois society, which begins as such from the mere necessity of calculating prices and monetary relations, gives way to the evidence of its real determination as such a science. That is, to the evidence of its determination as the science that expresses the essence of the alienation of human powers as powers of the social production process, which is autonomously regulated through exchange, that is, as the scientific form necessary for alienated consciousness to found itself, seeing itself as an abstract free consciousness:

> Political economy has undoubtedly analyzed, although in an imperfect way, the concept of value and its magnitude, uncovering the content hidden beneath these forms. But it has not even thought to ask why this content takes that form, that is, why labor takes shape in value and why the measure of labor according to the time of its duration is reflected in the magnitude of value of the product of labor. These are formulas stamped with the stigma of formulas typical of a society in which the process of production commands man, rather than man commanding the process of production; yet the bourgeois consciousness of that society considers them as something necessary by nature, logical and self-evident, like productive labor itself (pp. 44-45).

Political economy then needs to uncover human labor as the substance of value, but it cannot even ask why this substance needs to be represented as something distinct from itself,

precisely as value, that is, as the capacity for exchange inherent in commodities. It happens that the very question of why labor materialized in commodities is represented as their exchangeability, as a social relationship between them, reveals the starting point for the discovery of the necessarily historical, that is, transitory nature of capitalist society:

> One of the fundamental flaws of classical political economy is that it never succeeded in unraveling from the analysis of the commodity, and more especially of its value, the form of value that turns it into exchange value. Precisely in the figures of its greatest representatives, such as Adam Smith and Ricardo, the form of value is studied as something perfectly indifferent or external to the very nature of the commodity. The reason for this is not only that the analysis of the magnitude of value completely absorbs their attention. The cause is deeper. The form of value assumed by the product of labor is the most abstract and, at the same time, the most general form of the bourgeois mode of production, thus characterizing it as a specific modality of social production and, simultaneously, and precisely for that reason, as a historical modality. Therefore, anyone who sees in it the eternal natural form of social production will necessarily overlook what is specific in the form of value and, consequently, in the commodity form, which, as it develops, leads to the money form, the capital form, etc. (p. 45).

Hence, political economy necessarily leaves behind its original nature, genuinely scientific however alienated it may have been, to reach its full development as a direct production of alienated consciousness that prides itself on being an abstractly free consciousness, that is, as pure and simple ideology. Although, at this stage, the necessity of the specific content of this ideology still appears as something external. This is reflected in the fact that Marx does not develop it in the main body of the text, but rather in a footnote:

> And, to say it once and for all, I will warn that what I understand by classical political economy is all the economy that, since W. Petty, investigates the internal concatenation of the bourgeois mode of production, as opposed to vulgar economy, which knows nothing beyond probing apparent connections, merely caring to explain and make pleasant the most inflated phenomena, if we may use the expression, and chewing them until turning them into mush for the domestic use of the bourgeoisie from the materials supplied by scientific economics long ago, and which otherwise content itself with systematizing, pedanticizing, and proclaiming as eternal truths the trivial and conceited ideas that agents of the bourgeois mode of production form about their world, like the best of all possible worlds (p. 45)

Marx explains the extent to which political economy is trapped by the fetishism of commodities, and at the same time produces the ideological forms in which this fetish is expressed, through an example. It is, no more and no less, what will eventually be established as the foundation of the theory of production typical of the general form of vulgar economy, namely, the production of value through the materiality of the means of production.

> To what extent the fetishism attached to the world of commodities, that is, the material appearance of the social conditions of labor, clouds the vision of many economists is proven, among other things, by that tedious and foolish discussion about the role of nature in the formation of exchange value. Exchange value is nothing more than a specific social way of expressing the labor invested in an object and therefore cannot contain any natural substance, just as exchange rates, for example, cannot. (p. 46)

Let us return to the consideration of the commodity itself. At this stage, the commodity, which at the beginning appeared merely as an external starting point for understanding the society where the capitalist mode of production prevails, is fully revealed as the simplest concrete form taken by the general social relation, that is, the general organization of the process of social metabolism in that society. And it is as such a materialized social relation that this condition of the commodity appears to the consciousness of its producers as an attribute naturally belonging to the commodity itself. The commodity is the objectified form of alienated consciousness.

But having advanced this far, it itself makes evident that what we are doing is unfolding an alienated consciousness—our own as producers of commodities—in the process of understanding its own alienation. When it comes to a process of recognition from the social point of view, we realize that from its very first paragraph, Capital is the unfolding of this consciousness which discovers itself in its alienation, presented in a material form that has objective social existence—that is, that can be socially appropriated—a published book. What has not been revealed so far in any way is the necessity of our alienated consciousness to discover its alienation, or, in other words, that determination which arises from the alienation of consciousness in the commodity is realized through an alienated consciousness that denies itself as such in recognizing its own alienation. All that we have found so far in this regard is that even the simple discovery that in value an organization of labor is expressed presupposes the general existence of alienated consciousness and, therefore, the generalization of the commodity as a social relation:

> Aristotle could not decipher on his own, by analyzing the form of value, the fact that in the form of the values of commodities all labor is expressed as equal human labor, and therefore as equivalent, because Greek society was based on slave labor and thus had, as a natural foundation, the inequality between men and their labor forces. The secret of the expression of value, the equality and equivalence of value of all labor, insofar as they are and by the fact of being all human labor in general, could only be discovered from the moment when the idea of human equality already possessed the firmness of popular prejudice. And for this, it was necessary to reach a society like the current one, in which the commodity form is the general form assumed by the products of labor, in which, therefore, the predominant social relation is the relation of men to each other as owners of commodities. What precisely attests to Aristotle's genius is having discovered in the expression of the value of commodities a relation of equality. It was the historical limitation of the society of his time that prevented him from unraveling what this relation of equality consisted of, "strictly speaking" (p. 26).

On the other hand, at this point we are still far from knowing whether, in the capitalist mode of production, labor possesses a power to transform nature into a means for human life that is specifically superior to what was achieved under historically previous modes of organizing social production. But what we do know already is that, if it exists, this specific power to appropriate natural forces necessarily has its starting point in the private character with which social labor is carried out in the capitalist mode of production. This is the only attribute that distinguishes, from the outset, labor organized socially in this way from labor organized based on any of the forms historically taken by direct relationships between people. Thus, this power can only arise from the ability to consciously, that is, freely, govern one's own individual labor process as an independent private producer. Furthermore, if labor has any power to surpass the capitalist mode of production itself, this power can only originate from that specific attribute that distinguishes it within.

However, we also already know that commodity producers have the ability to consciously manage their own individual work process at the cost of lacking any control over the social essence of their formally private labor. Thus, the free will they exercise in organizing their individual work processes comes up against the powers of their own social labor, a power that is foreign to them. And not simply alien, but as a power attributed to the material product of their labor, when it becomes the social relationship that organizes the collective work of independent private producers. The will of these producers thus has a specific limit to its freedom. Namely, it can only be exercised insofar as it submits to the domain of the social powers of the material product of its own activity, that is, by being, it embodies, personifies, the powers inherent in the commodity. Therefore, we already know at this point that overcoming the capitalist mode of production can only consist of transforming the powers of social labor, from alienated powers in the generalized material social relation (the commodity) into powers belonging to the will of the producers who consciously control their own labor process. But, at the same time, we also know that this freedom of the will of the direct producers, converted into a directly social power, can only come into being if the commodity itself, that is, the simplest concrete form of the general social relation that unites the capitalist mode of production, carries within it the necessity to develop by having this form as its concrete way of realizing itself. That is, the freedom of the will of direct producers cannot be generated in the capitalist mode of production as the assertion of an abstractly free consciousness, separate from its own determination as a specific concrete form of the organization of social labor. The possibility of such an assertion would presuppose that commodity producers are socially connected to each other, above their social relation materialized in the commodity, by an allocation of their total labor capacity under the distinct concrete useful forms of it in a directly conscious way. It would presuppose, then, the absurdity that the consciousness of commodity producers is, on the one hand, alienated in the commodity, and, on the other hand, free from all alienation. The freedom of the will of direct producers can only be generated in the capitalist mode of production as the negation of consciousness alienated in the material product of social labor, and therefore, as the negation of the negation of free consciousness.

Chapter 5

The presentation of the analysis of the commodity regarding the nature of the action of value-producing labor and what political economy sees in it

Once we have followed the full development of the analysis of commodities and the labor that produces commodities as carried out by Marx, we can pause, not on its content, but on the very form of its exposition in relation to the attempts made by both Marxist and non-Marxist political economy to erase the character of action, and therefore the materiality, of labor that produces value.

As he progresses in the analysis of the commodity in order to uncover the determination of value, Marx faces the need to ask about the concrete specificity of the action capable of objectifying in the commodity the social attribute that allows it to enter into an equal relationship with another of a different use-value. But he does not make this need explicit; instead, he proceeds by giving the exposition the form of facing the question of the action in question by directly affirming its result as a quality of the commodity:

> Now, if we disregard the use value of commodities, they retain only one quality: that of being products of labor. But not products of a real and concrete labor. By disregarding their use value, we also disregard the material elements and forms that make them such a use value.[1]

Let's move on to the point in the analysis where Marx presents his key discovery regarding the historical specificity of commodity-producing labor. Marx does not show that this discovery results from asking about the specific quality that gives the materiality of abstract labor the fact that the producer has full control over their individual work. He presents it as if it arose from observing a fact that occurs universally in the social division of labor among commodity producers:

> Only products of independent private labor, each independent of the other, can take on the character of commodities in their mutual relations.[2]

Under this approach to presenting the course of analysis, the active nature of labor as the source of value—that is, the fact that the exchangeability of the commodity, its value, must have been imbued in the thing, in its use-value, by an action that has transformed it from

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[1] Karl Marx, Capital, Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1973, Volume 1, p. 5,

[2] Marx, Capital, op. cit., p. 9.

lacking this attribute into possessing it—is diluted in the direct enunciation of its result. Consequently, this very mode of presentation can give rise to the appearance that the analysis has simply confronted the mere manifestation of the attribute.

The question of why Marx decided to give his exposition of the analysis these two forms could only have been answered with certainty by Marx himself. It is possible that he did so so that it would be the synthetic reproduction of the movement of commodities in the expression of their value in the necessary form of exchange value, and not the analysis, that would itself reveal the reason for the determination in question. This possibility could be linked to the following synthesis made by Marx regarding the scientific method:

> Indeed, it is much easier to find through analysis the earthly core of the nebulous images of religion than to proceed in reverse, starting from the conditions of real life in each era to trace back to their deified forms. This latter method is the only one that can be considered the materialist method, and therefore scientific.[3]

In the same vein, the following observation that Marx makes once the development of value under its necessary concrete form as exchange value has been unfolded could be noted:

> Therefore, everything that the commodity's value analysis had already told us is now repeated by the linen itself, in its interaction with another commodity, the frock coat. What happens is that the linen expresses its ideas in its own peculiar language, the language proper to a commodity. To say that labor, considered in the abstract, as human labor, creates its own value, it tells us that the frock coat, in what it has in common with it, or, whatever the case may be, in what it has of value, is formed by the same labor as the linen. To say that its sublime materialization of value is not confused with its stiff body of linen, it tells us that value presents the form of a frock coat and that, therefore, the linen, considered as an object of value, resembles the frock coat as one egg resembles another.[4]

On the other hand, those who fulfill the ideological role of denying the historically specific determination of value by the private realization of social labor only see in these forms of presentation of the analysis process, which can make it appear sustained in statements external to the search for an attribute rather than the action that imparts that attribute, loopholes through which to operate. For these ideologists, the issue lies in gaining a foothold in these forms of presentation in order to present the analysis that has ideally penetrated its object while asking about its necessity, inverted as if it were an analysis that reduces that very necessity to the exteriority of the mere repetition or non-repetition of its existence as realized. This reduction is the basis of all representation through concepts. On this basis, it is proclaimed that the analytical process by which Marx discovers the substance of value in labor is flawed by partiality, for arbitrarily leaving out another series of possible traits that recur:

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[3] Ibid., p. 303, no. 4

[4] Ibid, p. 19.

> The second step in the argument is even worse: "If we disregard the use value of commodities"—such are Marx's words—"they only retain one quality: that of being products of labor." Is that so? I ask today as I asked twelve years ago: is there no other property? Is it not also common to all exchangeable goods to be scarce in proportion to demand? Or to be subject to supply and demand? Or to be owned? Or to be natural products? Regarding being products of nature, as well as products of labor, no one affirms it more clearly than Marx himself, when he declares in one place that "commodities are combinations of two elements, natural matter and labor." Or is it not a property common to exchangeable goods—a property Marx draws attention to in the third volume—that they incur costs to their producers?[5]

As is typical of analysis based on the exteriority of repetition, Bohm-Bawerk reverses the determination, listing concrete forms in which the specific common substance must manifest itself as if they could be its causes. And when an action is filtered through that enumeration, it can only be of a natural character, that is, beyond any possibility of generating a social quality specifically characteristic of commodities, which is revealed in their quantitative equivalence in exchange.

Such an appeal to natural action is not surprising. Bohm-Bawerk expresses the conception typical of political economy regarding the idea that exchangeability is not an attribute added at a given point in history to certain use-values, but an attribute with which they have come into the world by nature from the beginning. What is remarkable, however, is the absence in his listing of the only human action to which the "subjective theory of value" resorts as the source of value. As is inherent to a theoretical representation that can only explain phenomena by attributing their cause to their very manifestation, that action cannot be anything other than the action of valuing use-values in relation to their utility. But even the appeal to this action would not have allowed Bohm-Bawerk to go beyond enumerating apparent attributes as the cause of the value of commodities. First, the theory itself conceives this action, by definition, as purely subjective. This characteristic renders it powerless to transform the use-value of commodities, that is, their material body, into the bearer of a common substance whose quantitative equivalence is expressed in exchange. Not for nothing, tastes are subjective, but commodity prices are not. Second, obviously, the valuation of goods as useful objects occurs both when they are commodities and when they are not. This leaves the theory with no choice but to resort to exchange itself as the action in which pure subjective valuation manifests as a quantitatively objective equivalence embodied in the commodity. Thus, in its own terms, it can only explain the exchangeability of commodities by the existence of exchange. This circular reasoning, where, as we have just pointed out, the manifestation of the phenomenon is conceptually represented as its cause, only highlights the crude nature of such a theory. To complete the picture, as anyone who is drowning knows how much they can value the air they breathe without this valuation granting it the virtue of exchangeability, the theory in question can only subordinate the action of valuing use-values to the result of negating all action itself,

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[5] Ewgen von Böhm-Bawerk, Karl Marx and the class of his system, New York: Augustus M. Kelly, 1949, p. 75, own translation.

that is, to scarcity.

Nor is the 'objective' theory of value or the 'labor theory of value' foreign to the attempt to reduce Marx's analysis of the commodity to the search for recurring attributes, instead of recognizing that analysis as the search for the specific action capable of embedding those attributes in its products:

> As a value, a commodity is a feature of a specific historical form of society that is distinguished by two main characteristics: 1) a developed division of labor and 2) private production. In such an order—and in no other—the work of producers is realized in commodities, or if we forget the universal aspect of commodities (their usefulness), in values. ... It is essential to realize that it was this analysis of the social characteristics of commodity production [...] that led Marx to identify labor as the substance of value.... The requirement that all economic categories must represent social relations led Marx directly to labor considered as 'the value that lies hidden behind' the exchange value.[6]

Those who begin by denying the materiality of abstract labor, and then proceed to present it as the historically specific attribute of commodity-producing labor, only to end up overlooking abstract labor organized privately as the concrete action that imparts this attribute to commodities, rely on the same denial of the specific form that analysis takes as a necessary moment in the dialectical reproduction of the concrete. These conceptions need to pause at the appearance that analysis aims to discover an attribute as such rather than the action that gives the attribute. Because, once it is clear that analysis progresses in search of an action in itself, the very condition of being such makes it impossible to abstract it from its material essence, no matter how much one abstracts from the diversity of concrete forms in which it is realized. Put otherwise, outside of idealist fantasies, every action is, in essence, a material process of transforming energy.

A clear example of how labor is emptied of its condition as action in order to be presented as an inert existence is provided by Rubin when he states that, in exchange, the concrete private labor that has produced the commodity is transformed into abstract social labor. As is obvious, at the moment of exchange, the labor that produced the commodity, whatever its nature may have been, can no longer be transformed into anything. It is an action completed in the past. Everything that commodity-producing labor can be and do, it will have been and done at the moment of being realized, that is, in its condition as action. Afterwards, its product, as its materialization, not the labor itself, may lose the attributes that this labor gave it; or it may gain new ones through the action that other ongoing labor applied to commodity production subtracts or adds to it indirectly.

Hence Rubin's urgency in disqualifying the starting point of the analysis, reducing it to a matter of 'simplifying the presentation,' only to proclaim immediately afterward that 'it must be considered in reverse order.' That is, one must start by knowing in advance the objectified form that the social relation takes and its corresponding fetishistic consciousness, in order to explain

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[6] Paul Sweezy, Theory of Capitalist Development, Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1969, p. 38.

what commodities, value, and value-producing labor are. It is no coincidence that Rubin and his followers claim that form explains content, rather than that it is necessary to know the content to explain the reason for its concrete forms. And, not coincidentally, they forget to explain how they know what commodity fetishism is before knowing what commodity value is, and, therefore, before knowing what a commodity is:

> Marx approaches human society starting from things, and then considers labor. He begins with things that are visible and moves toward phenomena that must be revealed through scientific analysis. Marx uses this analytical method in the first five pages of Capital in order to simplify his presentation. But the dialectical course of his thought must be interpreted in reverse order. Marx moves from the difference between the production process and its social form, that is, from the social structure of the commodity economy, to the dual character of labor considered in its technical and social aspects and to the dual nature of the commodity as use value and exchange value [...] Thus, what is revealed is an inseparable connection between Marx's theory of value and its general methodological foundations as formulated in his theory of commodity fetishism.[7]

[7] Isaak Rubín, Essays on the Marxist Theory of Value, Buenos Aires: Cuadernos de Pasado y Presente, 1974, vol. 53, pp. 124-125.

Chapter 6
The development of the exposition on the dual character of labor and abstract labor, from its primitive forms to the final one

In Capital, Marx highlights the material character of abstract labor itself and, therefore, its specific qualitative determination. He precisely criticizes political economy for its inability to establish the nature of this real quality:

> As far as value in general is concerned, classical political economy never explicitly distinguishes, with clear awareness of what it is doing, between labor materialized in value and that which takes form in the use value of its product. In fact, it naturally makes the distinction, since in one case it considers labor quantitatively and in another case from a qualitative point of view. But it never occurs to it to think that the simple quantitative difference of various labors presupposes their qualitative unity or equality, and therefore, their reduction to abstract human labor.[1]

On the contrary, in his drafts, when he has barely confronted the commodity through the analysis of money—that is, before discovering the commodity as the simplest specific concrete form of the capitalist mode of production by analyzing its double character as use-value and value—abstract labor presents itself to him as having a different nature. He does not yet discover it as a material form itself, which is necessarily realized in the form of qualitatively specific labor, but rather as an abstract form of purely ideal existence:

> The commodity must first of all be converted into labor time, that is, into something qualitatively different from itself (qualitatively different: [...] 2) because it is not the objectification of labor time in general, which exists only in representation - it is only labor separated from its quality, differing only quantitatively - but rather it is the determined result of a particular labor, naturally determined, qualitatively different from other labors) ...[2]

However, in the same draft, Marx already points out the need to question the materiality of abstract labor, noting that the abstract nature inherent in representation is nothing more than the reflection in thought of a real materiality:

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[1] Karl Marx, Capital, Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1973, Volume I, p. 4

[2] Karl Marx. Fundamental Elements for the Critique of Political Economy (draft) 1857-1858, Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 1971, vol. 1, p. 68.

> These relationships of material dependency, as opposed to personal ones (the relationship of material dependency is nothing more than [[the set of]] social bonds that automatically oppose seemingly independent individuals, that is, [[the set of]] reciprocal production bonds made autonomous with respect to individuals) also appear in such a way that individuals are now dominated by abstractions, while before they depended on each other. Abstraction or the idea is, however, nothing more than the theoretical expression of these material relations that dominate them.[3]

In the Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, Marx makes decisive progress in the discovery of the material nature of abstract labor:

> The labor that is embodied in equal quantities in these diverse products must itself be uniform work, undifferentiated, simple, for which it makes no difference whether it is materialized in gold, iron, wheat, or silk, just as it makes no difference to oxygen whether it is found in rust, in the atmosphere, in grape juice, or in blood... The labor that creates exchange value, indifferent to the particular substance of use values, is equally indifferent to the particular form of the work itself... Moreover, different use values are the products of the activity of different individuals and, therefore, the result of work differentiated by its individual character. But as exchange values, they express equal, undifferentiated labor, that is, labor in which the individuality of the workers is erased. The labor that creates exchange value is, therefore, general abstract labor.[4]

However, just as Marx does not yet clearly distinguish the value from its form of manifestation as exchange value, referring to the former as if it were the latter, he also does not yet fully distinguish between the analysis of the commodity and the analysis of the labor that produces commodities. Thus, in order to analytically advance on the determinations that in *Capital* he directly presents as inherent to labor, he can only begin by stating them externally, as if they were a series of points or aspects that knowledge must account for:

> To fully understand how exchange value is determined by labor time, one must keep in mind the following essential ideas: the reduction of labor to simple labor, so to speak, devoid of quality; the specific way in which labor that creates exchange value, and therefore produces commodities, is social labor; and finally, the distinction between labor insofar as it is realized in use values, and labor insofar as it is realized in exchange values.[5]

By this path, Marx still presents the course of analysis in reverse. It does not continue to advance in search of which quality of labor renders goods exchangeable. On the contrary, he presents it as following a reversed course, as the search for the condition that labor must meet

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[3] Ibid, p. 92.

[4] Karl Marx. Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, Buenos Aires: Ediciones Estudio, 1973, p. 17.

[5] lbid, pp. 18-19.

in order for the exchangeability of goods to be measurable by it. Hence, he does not confront the relationship between abstract and concrete labor as the relationship between the expenditure of human labor power in general and the specific forms in which this expenditure is realized, but as a relationship of reducing the latter to the former. In this way, he comes to discover the concrete materiality of abstract labor, that is, its being a productive expenditure of the human organism in general. Yet, at the same time, this concrete materiality is presented to him as having its real existence only reflectively through individual average labor. As a result, the qualitative determination of abstract labor in itself, the productive expenditure of the human body in general, is presented as if its own quality depended upon the historically conditioned individual average:

> To measure the exchange values of commodities by the amount of labor time they contain, it is necessary that the different types of labor themselves be reduced to an undifferentiated, uniform, simple labor—that is, to labor that is qualitatively the same and therefore only differs in quantitative terms. This reduction appears as an abstraction, but it is an abstraction that is realized daily in the process of social production. The reduction of all commodities to labor time is not a greater abstraction, nor at the same time, less real than the conversion of all organic bodies into air. In practice, the labor measured in this way in terms of time does not present itself as the labor of different individuals, but rather the different individuals who work appear as merely simple organs of labor. In other words, the labor as it appears in exchange values could be called general human labor. This abstraction of general human labor exists in the average labor that any average individual of a given society can perform; it is a determined productive expenditure of human muscles, nerves, brain, etc. It is simple labor for which any average individual can be trained, which must be carried out in one way or another ...[6]

As we will see, in Capital, Marx does not limit himself to uncovering the differentiation in the very reality of labor, that is, in its materiality, as abstract and concrete. This differentiation is the axis that will guide him in the development of the dual character of the capitalist production process as a unit of the labor process and the valorization process. In this dual process, only in its abstract materiality does living labor create value, and only in its concrete materiality does living labor preserve existing value. In his notes on Wagner's "Treatise on Political Economy," Marx emphasizes the key nature of the step from the analysis of the commodity to the analysis of commodity-producing labor, the only way to overcome the appearance of abstract labor as a mere undifferentiation among concrete labors, in order to confront it in its real materiality as an expenditure of human labor power:

On the other hand, vir obscurus has not realized that, even when analyzing the commodity, I do not dwell on the dual form in which it appears, but immediately go on to demonstrate that in this dual form of the commodity the dual character of the labor of which it is the product is

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[6] Marx, Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, op. cit., p. 19.

manifested: useful labor, that is, the concrete 'modes' of the various labors that create use-values, and abstract labor, labor as expenditure of labor-power, no matter the 'useful' way it is expended (which is what the study of the production process is later based on); ...[7]

[7] Karl Marx, Marginal Notes on Adolph Wagner's «Treatise on Political Economy», Mexico City: Cuadernos de Pasado y Presente, 1982, vol. 97, p. 50.

Chapter 7
The character, materiality, and objectification in its product: the labor of the producer of 'services.' Human labor in general and its materiality

7.1 Critical recognition of the development by Marx regarding labor whose product is consumed simultaneously with its production

As we proceed by reproducing the analysis of the commodity on our own, in the first part of this book, we encounter two types of use-values that carry value when produced by socially organized labor under private and independent conditions. The first corresponds to those use-values whose process of consumption is materially separate from the process of production, given that the finished existence of the product is a condition for it. The second corresponds to use-values whose consumption is materially inseparable from the unfolding of their production process, commonly referred to as 'services.' Although in everyday language the term 'object' or 'thing' more immediately refers to the first type of use-value, strictly speaking, the second type also takes the material form of an objectification or reification of the action of the subject who produced it; a material form whose appropriation as a use-value does not imply the appropriation of the subjectivity of that person. Therefore, both types have an objectified existence, external both to the subjectivity of the one who produces them and to that of the one who consumes them. In turn, we saw that all labor is a material productive expenditure of human body carried out in a concrete determined form, whose product necessarily has a material existence, even if it consists of words capable of being carried by the wind. Consequently, we already stated that the expressions immaterial labor and immaterial product each involve contradictions in terms.

In his 1857-58 drafts of A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy (published as Fundamental Elements for the Critique of Political Economy (draft) 1857-1858), and more extensively in his 1861-63 drafts of Capital (published as Theories of Surplus Value), Marx pauses to examine the issue of the "materiality" and the specific social character presented by the productive processes whose products must be consumed in the very course of those processes. His exposition revolves around the analysis of the conceptions of political economy present at the time. These generally do not clearly distinguish the productive character of labor from the perspective of the production of use-values, the production of value, and the production of surplus value, that is, from the perspective of capital. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to the perspective to which Marx's analysis refers at each moment. Since at this stage we have not yet dealt with the determinations of surplus-value-producing labor, our analysis is limited to considering the other two perspectives; although it is worth noting that surplus-value-producing labor has, as its primary condition, the being producer of value. Within the field we have defined, we focus on the question of the materiality of labor producing

"services" provided privately and independently, since, as will be seen, this is where the difference between the result of our own analysis and that of the analysis presented by Marx lies.

First of all, Marx recognizes the status of use-values in the products of labor, whose consumption takes place in the very process of their production. In turn, the fact that their appropriation involves a simple exchange relationship between equivalents reveals these products as bearers of value, that is, that they have the specific social form of commodities:

> The same worker can buy labor, that is, goods, that are offered to him in the form of services, and the expenditure of his salary on this type of services is no different from the expenditure of his salary on any other type of goods. The services bought by the worker can be more or less necessary; they can be, for example, the services of a doctor or those of a priest, just as he can buy bread or liquor.[1]

> When a capitalist has wood cut to roast his mutton, not only does the person cutting it position himself in relation to him, but the capitalist himself is also positioned in relation to the woodcutter within a simple exchange relationship. The person who cuts the wood provides a service to the capitalist, a use value that does not increase the capital but consumes it, and in return, the capitalist provides him with another commodity, in the form of money. [...] This [exchange] is a consumption of the revenue, and as such always corresponds to simple circulation, not to that of capital.[2]

> In the relationship of simple circulation. [...] When the peasant receives a traveling tailor in his home [...] and gives him the material to make him garments. Or when I give money to a doctor so that he properly restores my health. What is important in these cases is the service that both provide to each other. [...] The man who makes me a suit from fabric, for which I have provided the material, gives me a use value. But instead of giving it in an objective form, he gives it in the form of activity. On my part, I give him a finished use value; he prepares another for me. The difference between past, objectified labor and living, present labor appears here only as a formal difference between the different tenses of labor, which on one occasion is in the perfect past and on another in the present. [...] Now then: the suit not only contains a certain labor that gave it its form—a certain form of usefulness, transmitted to the cloth by the movement of labor—but it also contains a certain amount of labor, and therefore not only use value, but value in general, value as such. [...] In personal services, this use value is consumed as such, without passing from the form of movement to that of the thing.[3]

For Marx, the use value produced is the service itself. It is labor that produces a use value, but lacks any product that exists in itself, whatever its nature might be. Hence, he rejects

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[1] Karl Marx, Theories of Surplus Value I, Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1980, p. 375.
[2] Karl Marx, Fundamental Elements for the Critique of Political Economy (draft) 1857-1858, Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 1971, vol. 1, p. 213.
[3] Ibid, pp. 427-428.

defining the use values in question as 'immaterial products,' emphasizing his point of view in considering the labor that produces them materially 'unproductive':

> Mr. Say calls these "services" consumed or their works, results, in a word, their use value, "products or immaterial values, which are consumed at the moment of their production." Instead of calling them "unproductive," he calls them "productive of immaterial products."[4]

Consequently, Marx excludes the use-values produced by these same services from the material product available to society to reproduce its life. This exclusion goes so far as to consider that the production of the use-values in question is sustained at the expense of the material product, while the need to consume them threatens the availability of that same material product. And he extends this exclusion even to labor that satisfies needs inherent to the mere material reproduction of human life, beyond the specific social form in which it is organized:

> [[If]] the part of the product whose value corresponds to income were reduced [...] if both the capitalist and the worker wanted to continue consuming the same amount of value as before in material goods, they would have to reduce what they invest in paying for the services of doctors, schoolteachers, etc. And, if they were forced to maintain the same payments for these purposes as before, they would have no choice but to limit their consumption of other things. It is, therefore, evident that the work of the doctor and the schoolteacher does not itself create the fund from which the payment of their services comes, even though their work enters into the production costs of the fund that generally creates all values, that is, into the production costs of labor power.[5]

However, under the circumstances presented, the same alternative would occur within the scope of consuming 'material things,' with a decision needing to be made between maintaining the consumption of one or the other. And this would not allow for any inference regarding the sources of the funds used for one purchase or the other.

It would seem to underlie the consideration that production defined as material could continue in full swing without the material condition, in itself, of the qualities of labor power resulting from medical care and educational training. And, more generally, that the consumption of use values that occurs simultaneously with their production necessarily has a circumstantial, dispensable, or accessory character, while the consumption of use values whose consumption presupposes the prior completion of their production necessarily has a universally inescapable character:

> The same services, like the goods I buy, can be necessary or seem so, as is the case, for example, with those of a soldier, a doctor, or a lawyer, or they may simply be services

[4] Marx, Theories of Surplus Value I, op. cit., pp. 236-237.

[5] Marx, Theories of Surplus Value 1, op. cit., p. 151.

> that provide me with enjoyment. This does not in any way change their economic purpose. When we feel healthy and do not need a doctor, or are lucky enough not to get involved in legal disputes, we avoid spending money on medical or legal services as if it were the plague.[6]

Similarly, it could be said that, if the same cases occurred, we would flee like the plague from spending money on buying medicine or stamped paper.

Marx bases the negation of the materiality of the product on the fact that its production cannot be separated from the person who produces it, as if there were no objectification of the body's productive expenditure, which the consumer appropriates, external to that person themselves. However, he presents an example in this regard, which highlights the existence of that objectification:

> Certain service provisions or the use values into which certain jobs or activities are transformed materialize into goods, while others, on the contrary, leave no tangible residue that can be distinguished from the person themselves, or do not result in a commodity that can be sold. For example, the services provided by a singer satisfy my aesthetic need, but my enjoyment is manifested in an action inseparable from the singer themselves and ends the moment the singing ends. What I enjoy is their activity, the impact of it on my hearing.[7]

The impact on the ear is the effect of the objectification of the singer's activity in the material form of sound waves; or, in this case, that of the teacher presenting in class. Just as it is the case with the cutting of human tissue and subsequent suturing performed by a doctor when providing a surgical service.

In contrast to the exclusion of services from the production of material wealth, Marx includes work that is materially productive when applied to passenger transport, even though it would also be a service whose "enjoyment is manifested in an action inseparable from the very person" of the one who provides it:

> ... there exists in material production a certain sphere [...] the locomotion industry, whether it is devoted to the transport of people or goods. [...] Here too, a material change occurs in the object upon which the labor falls: a change in space, [a] change of place. With regard to the transport of people, this is simply manifested as a service provided to them by the entrepreneur.[8]

However, moving a person's body from one place to another in space is neither more nor less a material change than the replacement of a worn-out bone with a prosthesis as a result of a doctor's service. The same can be said about the material transformation that occurs in the

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[6] Ibid, p. 375.
[7] Ibid., p. 375.
[8] Ibid., p. 382.

body of a person who cannot take care of themselves, when another person feeds them; and, why not, when someone goes to a hairdresser's services.

Despite these contradictions, it may seem that Marx is going to synthesize the nature of labor that produces use values in the form of services—excluding the transport of goods and people—in opposition to the nature of labor that produces material wealth, as 'immaterial' labor. However, his reference to immaterial production implies a different nature, a quality that goes beyond the separation between both types of labor:

> In immaterial production, even though it focuses purely on change and therefore manifests itself in the production of commodities, two possibilities exist:
>
> 1) That it is translated into goods, into use values that take on a form distinct and independent from the producer and the consumer, thus being able to exist in an interval between production and consumption, being able to circulate in this interval as salable commodities, which is what happens with books, paintings, in a word, with all works of art, distinct from the artistic activity of the painter who created them ...
> 2) Production is not separate from the act of producing, as we see in all performing artists, speakers, actors, teachers, doctors, priests, etc.[9]
>
> ... the spheres of production that are not directly related to the creation of material wealth, mainly the positive sciences (the natural sciences of capital...[10]

Later we will return to the meaning of this qualitative differentiation of certain productive activities, in which the intellectual form that takes the materiality of labor stands out, beyond whether the consumption of its product is subsequent to or simultaneous with the production process. However, to define a labor as 'immaterial' due to the very peculiarity presented by the materiality of the expenditure of human labor power it requires and that of its product can only create confusion.

Moreover, the striking contrast between the development carried out by Marx in his drafts regarding the production of use-values under the form of services, and the virtually complete absence of references to the specificity of services, as well as to the 'immaterial' nature of certain branches of social labor, in the published works, is remarkable. Regarding 'services,' both The Critique and Capital include barely two mentions, with similar content in both works. The first refers to 'services' as a quality of use-values, without any reference to their material form:

> This action of the commodity, the only one that makes it a use value, an object of consumption, can be called its service, the service it provides as a use value.[11]

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[9] Marx, Theories of Surplus Value J, op. cit., pp. 380-381

[10] Ibid, p. 159.

[11] Karl Marx, Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, Buenos Aires: Ediciones Estudio, 1973, p. 26.

> Service is the utility provided by a use value, commodity, or labor.[12]

The second mention refers to the ideological use given to the term by political economy:

> It is understood that 'service,' the category 'service,' must be imposed on economists like J. B. Say and F. Bastiat, whose clever reasoning, as Malthus rightly observed, always abstracts from the specific determined form of economic relations.[13]

> And the same goes for the expenses of all the so-called unproductive workers, public officials, doctors, lawyers, etc., and of all those who, in one form or another of the 'general public,' provide economists with the 'service' of explaining what they themselves are unable to explain.[14]

On the other hand, Capital barely contains an indirect reference to 'immaterial' production, regarding productive labor from the capital's point of view:

> If we are allowed to give an example outside the realm of material production, we would say that a school teacher is a productive worker if, in addition to shaping the minds of children, he shapes his own work to enrich the employer.[15]

Once again, the reason why Marx, after having extensively laid out in his drafts the specific determinations he found in labor applied to the production of commodities whose consumption is inseparable from it, does not even mention the issue in the published texts, could only have been unequivocally explained by Marx himself. Now, when Marx addresses the issue in his drafts, he finds that the product of such labor lacks an objectified existence distinct from the very subjectivity of the person performing it. On this basis, he concludes that the resulting product does not integrate into the mass of society's material wealth, and that, consequently, those who produce it can only reproduce their life at the expense of consuming from this mass without contributing to it. He explicitly extends this determination to concrete forms of labor that produce conditions that pertain to the simply material production and reproduction of human life.

On the contrary, our analysis has led us to confront the fact that the existence of commodities whose consumption is inseparable from their production process is conditioned by the objectification of the private labor that produces them in a way that is external to the very subjectivity of their producer. And, therefore, that the appropriation of that objectification by the consumer of its use-value does not imply the appropriation of the producer's subjectivity itself. From this, it follows that this objectified product forms part of the material wealth of society, on an equal footing with commodities whose production precedes their consumption,

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[12] Karl Marx, Capital, Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1973, Vol. I, p. 144.

[13] p. 144. Marx, Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, op. cit., p. 26. In Capital, Marx reproduces this observation from the Contribution on p. 144.

[14] Marx, Capital, op. cit., vol. II, p. 406.

[15] Ibid, vol. I, p. 426.

insofar as the generic attribute by which we have recognized them so far as use-values that satisfy human needs—whether these arise "from the stomach or imagination"—is concerned, as a product of socially necessary abstract labor objectified in them in a private and independent manner. It is therefore not appropriate to refer to its production as "immaterial."

The critical use of Marx's work as a guide for our process of recognition from a social point of view is fully evident when faced with the opposition presented. It is not a question of setting aside the determinations opposed to those proposed by Marx that we have found, convincing ourselves that we must dogmatically repeat what he affirmed, and henceforth turning our dialectical reproduction of the determinations of the commodity into a representation based on what, according to our own analysis, is an appearance. Even less is it about taking the determinations we have found, opposed to those set out by Marx, and declaring that the former correspond to what Marx 'truly meant.' What it is about is making the difference we have found evident and grounding it, and advancing in the dialectical reproduction on the basis that, with regard to the concrete form in question, the course of this reproduction does not have the character of a simple process of recognition from a social point of view, but one of original knowledge from that same point of view. Of course, however original our knowledge may be in this sense, its development has been enhanced by the very previous knowledge which, as in all cases, it has subjected to critique by demanding that it account for the necessity of the concrete real form we are confronting. Only that, in the face of the singularity of this concrete real form, it has not done so.

7.2 The appeal to 'immaterial labor' by postmodern Marxism to conceive the consciousness of commodity producers as abstractly free (Negri and Lazzarato)

Economic theory naturally tends to contrast "goods" and "services," as if trying to encompass two particular material forms within the universality of useful objects: "Goods can be divided into commodities, such as oranges [...] and services, such as haircuts ..."[16] And the same opposition extends its naturalness to the interior of the market, not only in the realm of neoclassical economics: "... all kinds of goods and services that can be displayed in a market ...".[17] In both cases, it is uncritically overlooked that reference is being made to the first type of use-value because of the historically specific social form it takes when produced privately, and to the second because of the material form of its production and consumption processes, whatever social form governs those processes.

This possibility of mixing the material specificity of labor, whose product is consumed inseparably from its production, with the materialized form that the social relationship takes, based on naming this specificity as 'immateriality,' becomes a complete inversion in the hands of postmodern Marxism.

In our current development, we have only just reached the commodity in its simplest form as a product of socially necessary abstract labor, materialized privately and independently in it, and not yet as a product of that same labor concretely determined as an attribute of capital.

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[16] Alfred Stonier and Douglas Hague, Manual of Economic Theory, Madrid: Aguilar, 1965, p. 9.

[17] Alfred Sohn-Rethel, Intellectual Work and Manual Work, Barcelona: Ediciones 2001, 1979, p. 27.

However, we have already discovered, in this simplest form of the commodity, the general social relation objectified characteristic of the capitalist mode of production. Thus, we have discovered that human personal freedom is not an abstract state of nature, but a socially and historically determined form of development of human subjectivity, proper to this very objectified general social relation. In this way, the social being of commodity producers takes shape in a subjectivity whose consciousness and will confront the product of their own action as a material objectified existence possessing the power to autonomously organize the process of human social metabolism, which as such is alien to them and dominates them. Personal subjectivity is determined, by its own social being, as a subjectivity whose free consciousness and will are the way it realizes its alienation in the commodity, that is, as the personification of the commodity.

Unlike Marx and in agreement with Say, according to Negri, the work of immaterial production is productive of 'immaterial goods':

> Immaterial labor – that which produces immaterial goods such as information, knowledge, ideas, images, relationships, and emotions – tends to become hegemonic.[18]

The supposed qualitative unity that Negri synthesizes under the name of 'immaterial goods' has no more secret than sliding through the ambiguity of the words 'produce' and 'goods'.

In its simplest and most general determination, human labor is the expenditure a person makes of their body with the aim of objectifying that expenditure into a result useful for the intended purposes, that is, into a use value. And this labor has a social character when the resulting objectification is useful to people other than the one who produced it. 'Information, knowledge, ideas, images,' whether thought representations or reproductions of real concrete things that have been subject to their ideal appropriation, are obviously products of human labor. And as they transcend the minds of their producers and acquire an objectified form that allows their appropriation by other subjects who recognize them as useful to them, they are determined as social use values.

The term "use value" has an unambiguous meaning: it is something that is useful for use, that exists independently of the subject, and whose properties serve to satisfy the needs of the latter. For this reason, neoclassical economics has been concerned with erasing use value from its terminology, replacing it with "commodity," a term loaded with an abstractly positive "valuation" that morally "justifies" the private hoarding of social wealth as an expression of maximizing the "well-being" of society. Now Negri intends to resort to the same type of abstractly positive valuation to present "relations and affections" as "commodities" produced by labor. The mere replacement of the term "commodities" in the sentence with "use values" reveals the crudeness of his ideological maneuver. But let us examine the matter more closely.

Relation is the form that reciprocal recognition takes as individual organs of the unity of

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[18] Antonio Negri, 'On the Future of Democracy,' in Alternatives International. No. 18 (2004), p. 44, cited by Henrique Amorim, 'Theoretical Continuities and Ruptures in André Gorz: Social Class, Work, and Professional Qualification,' in André Gorz and His Critics, ed. by Josué Pereira Da Silva and Iram Rodrigues, São Paulo: Annablume, 2006, p. 109, own retranslation from Portuguese.

the life process of the species, with which its members govern their actions in the process of reproducing their individual life. Work and the consumption of the products of work is the specifically proper form in which human beings carry out their process of social metabolism. In turn, the social relation, that is, the conscious reciprocal recognition as individual organs of this process, is the specifically proper form of the human being through which it is organized. In the capitalist mode of production, the general social relation is objectified in the product of social labor carried out privately and independently. Therefore, the material production process simultaneously produces this historically specific form of social relation. But this fact does not make the social relation in itself a "good," nor does it attribute its production to a form of "immaterial" labor.

In fact, a person's work cannot even by itself produce the consciousness and will in which another person will carry their own social relationship. Consciousness and will are the ways in which each person governs their individual action as an organ of the social life process and, as such, can only be produced by each person for themselves. What a person's work can do is operate on the process in which another produces their consciousness and will, objectifying itself in use values (whether for the 'body' or the 'mind') that they will consume as a product of social labor in that process.

Finally, affections are concrete forms of direct social relationships between people; that is, direct relationships of personal dependence, unrelated to objective rationality. Because of the first of these two determinations, affections are powerless to influence the general social relationship materialized in the capitalist mode of production, which takes shape in the absolute personal independence of private and independent producers. Because of the second, they represent the negation of the development of human capacity to organize their social life process with a consciousness that does not stop at phenomenal appearances, but rather progresses to uncover the objective necessity of the content that takes form in them.

In summary, Negri not only inverts the relations in which the organization of social labor takes shape, conceiving them as «goods» produced by it, but also strips those same social relations of their specific difference. That is, he puts in the same «goods» bucket the relations specific to the private organization of social labor along with the direct personal dependency relations inherent to the directly social organization of that labor. The question is obvious: what necessity underlies this double inversion? The answer is given by Negri himself in association with Lazzarato:

> Rereading the category of 'labor' in Marx, as the ontological foundation of subjects, also allows us to establish a theory of power, if we understand power as the capacity of free and independent subjects to intervene in the actions of other equally free and independent subjects. 'Action over another action,' according to Foucault's latest definition of power. The concepts of immaterial labor and 'mass intellectuality' therefore define not only a new quality of labor and pleasure, but also new relations of power and, consequently, new processes of subjectivation.[19]

[19] Maurizio Lazzarato and Antonio Negri, "Immaterial Labor and Subjectivity," in Futur antérieur, no. 6 (1991), retrieved from <https://www.multitudes.net/travail-immateriel-et-subjectivite>, own translation

For Lazzarato and Negri, personal freedom and independence have no content other than their immediate appearance. They refrain from asking about the determination of these two historically specific forms of social relation inherent to the private organization of social labor. By doing so, they abstract freedom and independence from their determination as the necessary forms of the alienation of the consciousness of commodity producers, regardless of the material form of their labor, into the commodity and, from there, into capital. In this way, they erase the fact that, in the capitalist mode of production, the 'processes of subjectivation' have no more historically specific determination than the development of the productive forces of labor as the production of a social power alienated in the product itself. Instead, they invert these processes into a festival of 'autonomous production of subjectivity' where the emptiness of determination by the general social relation reigns, disguised as 'indeterminacy capable of all determinations':

> The Marxist concept of labor power, which, at the level of the 'general intellect,' has become an 'indeterminacy capable of all determinations,' is thus developed by Deleuze and Foucault, in a process of autonomous production of subjectivity. Subjectivity as an element of absolute indeterminacy becomes an element of absolute potentiality. Therefore, the determining intervention of the capitalist employer is no longer necessary. The latter becomes increasingly external to the processes of producing subjectivity. The process of producing subjectivity, that is, the process of production itself, is constituted 'outside' of the relationship with capital, 'within' the constitutive processes of mass intellectuality, that is, within the subjectivation of labor.[20]

It is not for nothing that the postulated "indeterminacy capable of all determinations" is so abstractly "autonomous" that it excludes from the universality of its capacity the simplest and most general concrete determination of subjectivity in the capitalist mode of production, namely, alienation in the commodity. Correspondingly, it turns out that the existence of this mode of production has no historical determinant other than the "intervention" of the free and independent will of the "capitalist entrepreneur" on the production of the free and independent subjectivity of the "masses." And it turns out that the operation of "immaterial labor" by capital as a specifically necessary and potent moment of its valorization through the specific reproduction of alienated consciousness under the appearance of being abstractly free, reverses into the ambiguity of an undefined organization of social production and consumption that produces human subjectivity "outside" the relation with capital. Lazzarato unfolds his conception of this 'outside':

> That immaterial labor simultaneously produces both subjectivity and economic value demonstrates to what extent capitalist production has invaded the entirety of life and has broken down all barriers that not only separated but also opposed economy, power, and knowledge.[21]

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[20] Ibid, own translation.

[21] Maurizio Lazzarato, "The Cycle of Immaterial Production," in Futurantérieur, no. 0 18 (1993), retrieved

Lazzarato cannot see in the commodity, and therefore in capital, the generalized social relationship materialized that, as such, determines, that is, fully produces all individual subjectivity as an organ of the social metabolism process under this specific historical form taken by the development of the generic human being. From his point of view, this determination of subjectivity by the materialized generalized social relationship, that is, this determination of social being in the capitalist mode of production, is inverted into an 'invasion' of 'capitalist production' over the 'totality of life'; that is, it is inverted as an aggression carried out by a power coming from outside human life itself. An 'invasion' that has been imposed on 'assumed' 'ways of life' abstracted from their own social being:

> If innovation in immaterial production is introduced through this open process of creation, the entrepreneur, in order to fuel consumption for the sake of consumption and its perpetual renewal, will be forced to take from the 'values' that the public/consumer produces. These values presuppose ways of being, modes of existence, forms of life that serve as the principle and foundation for the values themselves.[22]

Lazzarato has thus completed his abstraction of the social being that takes shape in the individual subjectivity specific to the capitalist mode of production. First, he has turned the general social relation, materialized in the way the human life process regulates itself at a certain historical moment, into an 'invader' that, in order to assert itself in its domination, must test its 'legitimacy.' Second, he has turned 'modes of existence,' 'ways of life,' into entelechies abstracted in themselves, whose entire basis is to be 'the very life of society,' that is, to be themselves:

> The specificity of this type of 'production' [...] also raises a problem of legitimacy regarding the capitalist appropriation of this process. This cooperation cannot, in any case, be predetermined by the economic, since it concerns the very life of society. The economic can only appropriate the forms and products of this cooperation, standardize and normalize them. The creative and innovative elements are closely linked to the values that only forms of life produce.[23]

Despite his effort to turn every concrete form into an abstraction, Lazzarato cannot prevent the crude reality of the determination of 'immaterial labor' as an attribute of capital from slipping into his discourse:

> It is immaterial labor that continuously innovates the form and conditions of communication (and therefore of work and consumption). It shapes and materializes the consumer's needs, imagination, and tastes, and these products in turn become powerful producers of needs, of imagination, of tastes. [...] Immaterial workers (all those who

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from <https://enmedio.info/el-ciclo-de-la-produccion-inmaterial>, own translation.

[22] Ibid, own translation.

[23] Lazzarato, 'The Cycle of Immaterial Production,' op. cit., own translation

> work in advertising, fashion, marketing, television, IT, etc.) satisfy consumer demand and at the same time establish it.[24]

Once again, Lazzarato conceives of the subjectivity of the «consumer» as the bearer of 4 (needs, imagination, and tastes) abstracted from determination as forms of realizing their social being. In turn, the production of those «needs, imagination, and tastes» is likewise presented as separate from the realization of the general social relationship. It is about the representation of individual subjectivity as lacking social being, that is, the appearance characteristic of the representation of the individual as naturally free.

However, Lazzarato himself exposes the inverted nature of his conception. Above all, it is evident that the 'immaterial works' he invokes as capable of 'satisfying' and 'funding' the human subjectivity of the 'consumer' are far from appealing to the objective consciousness of their recipients, that is, to their ability to objectively recognize themselves in their determination as social subjects. On the contrary, they appeal to a consciousness that can only recognize itself when it identifies with objects outside of the person, which confront it as bearers of a certain social attribute, or when it identifies with the reified figures of other people who confront it as such bearers. That is to say, when it is produced and reproduced as a fetishistic consciousness that faces the product of its own action as the natural bearer of a social power that is foreign to it and dominates it. The supposedly novel production of a social relationship based on constructing the subjectivity of the 'consumer/communicator' through 'immaterial work' is nothing more than the production of consciousness imprisoned by the fetishism of the commodity under the renewed appearance of being an abstractly free consciousness.

7.3 General Human Labor and Its Materiality

When discussing the economy in the use of constant capital through inventions, far from referring to the work of producing them as if it had an immaterial character, or were unrelated to the production of material wealth, he defines it as general or generic labor:

> We note in passing that general labor should not be confused with collective labor. Both play a role in the production process, both intersect, but they should not be confused. General labor is all scientific labor, all discovery, all invention. It depends partly on cooperation with other living people, partly on making use of the works of previous generations. Collective labor presupposes direct cooperation among individuals. [...] the greatest benefits of all new developments achieved by the general labor of the human mind and by its social application through combined labor.[25]

As we stated at the outset, it is not a question of interpreting what Marx "meant" by the term "general labor." It is a question of subjecting to critique the quality of generality attributed by Marx to scientific labor. That is, of reproducing for ourselves the unfolding of the determinations of labor until we can make evident whether we truly recognize, in the

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[24] Ibid, own translation.

[25] Marx, Capital, op. cit., vol. III, p. 115.

materiality of scientific labor, the full expression of the human generic being.

As we saw earlier, the development of the generic human being is reflected in the development of the productive forces of social labor. From its original condition as an animal species, the human being begins to assert itself as the bearer of its own genus through the extent that the capacity of human labor to transform the environment into a medium for itself reaches, compared to the productive activity of any other animal species. This development takes shape in the transformation of the merely animal capacity to organize the process of species metabolism; that is, in the transformation of merely animal initial knowledge into properly human knowledge, which differs generically from the former due to its very extent. The continuous unfolding of this extent transcends itself, transforming into a difference that is essentially qualitative, determining human capacity to organize its social metabolism process as knowledge that recognizes itself as such—that is, as conscious knowledge. And by aiming at its goal consciously, human action is determined as voluntary action. The human being asserts itself as a generic subject in relation to animal species, not merely because of the scope of its labor capacity to transform the environment. It does so because of the very way in which it governs the development of the productive forces of its labor—that is, by consciously and voluntarily managing its labor. In this way, the human genus has determined itself as the subject of its own history: each human generation is the product of the work of the previous generation and, therefore, each human generation consciously and voluntarily produces the one that follows.

Up to this point, human labor is already generically distinguished from animal productive activity by the conscious and voluntary way it is governed. But it is not distinguished by the very form that direct productive activity takes. Like any animal productive activity, human labor still consists of applying bodily effort to the tool so that it operates on the object of labor and transforms it into a given use-value, no matter that such application is governed in a conscious and voluntary manner. One could say that within the material unit of human labor it is still possible to distinguish two moments: one whose materiality is generically proper to the human being by its essence, and another whose materiality is such due to the extensive and intensive deployment of its form, but not because of the form itself.

Labor only reaches its full determination as a material expenditure of generically human productive capacity in the unity of the content and form of its two moments when it develops machinery. That is, when it manages to detach from the tool and integrates it into a mechanism that operates automatically on the object of labor. In this way, the materiality of human labor comes to consist in the application of conscious and voluntary bodily effort to the development of knowledge about natural forces and to what is required for objectifying their control in machinery, so that they are applied automatically to the tool in order for it to act on the object of labor and transform it into a given use value.

> The worker no longer introduces the modified natural object, as an intermediate link, between the thing and himself, but rather inserts the natural process, which he transforms into an industrial one, as a means between himself and inorganic nature,

which he dominates.[26]

Now, the materiality of knowledge capable of ideally appropriating the movement of natural forces and governing the objectification of their control is specifically determined by its purpose. It is a type of knowledge that, by its form, must ideally appropriate the objective determinations in question within the very objectivity of these determinations. That is, a knowledge whose objectivity is carried by the very form of its process, or more simply, objective knowledge. Which is synonymous with scientific knowledge and its technological objectification:

> To the extent [...] that large-scale industry develops, the creation of effective wealth [...] depends more on the general state of science and the progress of technology, or on the application of this science to production. (The development of this science, essentially natural science and with it all other sciences, is in turn related to the development of material production).[27]

The development of the generic human being transcends the mere organization of their productive activity through conscious knowledge, to take concrete form in a consciousness that appropriates the existing relationship between one's own powers as a subject and the powers of the environment in their objective unity, that is, in a conscious knowledge capable of overcoming all appearance. Thus, we arrive at the necessary synthetic unity of general labor and collective labor:

> In this transformation, what appears as the fundamental pillar of production and wealth is neither the immediate work performed by man nor the time he works, but the appropriation of his own general productive power, his understanding of nature, and his mastery of it thanks to his existence as a social body; in a word, the development of the social individual.[28]

The development of the "own general productive force," that is, the one that is fully inherent to human beings as a generic subject, is effectively the development of the productive force of general labor. This is, the labor carried out collectively in the concrete form of the development of knowledge and objective mastery of the determinations of the social metabolism process. And Marx emphasizes the scientific quality inherent to general labor:

> Nature does not build machines, nor locomotives, railways, electric telegraphs, self-acting mutes, etc. These are products of human industry; natural material transformed into organs of human will over nature or of its action in nature. They are organs of the human brain created by the human hand, objectified force of knowledge. [...] Social

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[26] Karl Marx, Fundamental Elements for the Critique of Political Economy (draft) 1857-1858, Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI 1972, vol. 2, p. 228.
[27] Ibid, pp. 227-228.
[28] Ibid., p. 228.

> knowledge or general knowledge has become an immediate productive force, and, therefore, [...] the conditions of the social life process itself have come under the control of the general intellect and reshaped in accordance with it. [...] Social productive forces are produced not only in the form of knowledge but as immediate organs of social practice, of the real life process.[29]

The characteristic of "social or general knowledge," of the "general intellect," is not limited to that of a merely collective or multitudinous knowledge or intellect. Not without reason did Marx warn that "general labor should not be confused with collective labor. Both play their role in the production process, both intersect, but without being confused." Intellect is the human capacity to understand and reason about concrete, real forms. But, considered in itself, nothing indicates that this understanding and reasoning must have ideally appropriated the determinations of its object in a correspondingly objective manner. That is, nothing indicates that the intellect or knowledge in question could not have stopped at some appearance of its object, only to then represent its reasoning in a fanciful way. This is what happens with religious knowledge and intellect, no matter how collective and multitudinous it may be. And it is also the case with knowledge and intellect that, trapped by the fetishism of commodities, stops at the appearance of consciousness as abstractly free by its nature. General knowledge, general intellect, are the exercise of an objective understanding and reasoning. Objectivity that does not abstractly arise from the content of thought, but from its form, that is, from its method.[30]

The 'general intellect,' much to the chagrin of Negri and his companions, is not simply a collective intellect. It is a scientific, objective intellect that, by being such, can only be produced collectively. Hence, the production of that supposed 'good' called 'affections' does not fall within the realm of the exercise of the general intellect. Postmodern Marxism does not understand the difference between the reasons of the heart and the reasons of objective reason, and it attempts to place the former in the rightful place of the latter. Not for nothing is Francis of Assisi its paradigm of the revolutionary subject:

> In postmodernity, we find ourselves once again in the situation of Saint Francis of Assisi and we propose, against the misery of power, the joy of being. This is a revolution that no power will be able to control, because biopower and communism, cooperation and revolution, remain united, in love, simplicity, and also innocence. This is the irrepressible lightness and bliss of being a communist.[31]

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[29] Marx, Fundamental Elements for the Critique of Political Economy (draft) 1857-1858, op. cit., pp. 229-230.

[30] See Juan Inigo Carrera, Capital: Historical Reason, Revolutionary Subject, and Consciousness, Buenos Aires: Ediciones Imago Mundi, 2013, pp. 236-271.

[31] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Empire. Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2002, p. 3.

Part III
The theoretical naturalization of free consciousness, or the commodity fetishism as theoretical consciousness

Chapter 8
From Practical Consciousness to Psychoanalytic Theory

8.1 The practical consciousness of the commodity producer

At the moment they work for others and at the moment they consume the use-values produced by others, that is, in the very materiality of their process of social metabolism as human beings, commodity producers immediately see themselves as what they are, namely, people lacking any personal relationship with others. The only relationship that is manifested in this immediacy is the material relationship that their persons establish with things as use-values. At the same time, their general social relationship, that is, the way in which they organize the materiality of their social metabolism process, presents itself to them as external to their own persons, as a power belonging to the things themselves, which automatically imposes itself upon them through the relationship that these things establish among themselves.

Since the producer of commodities is a free individual who at the same time is subject to the social power of the product of his labor, there is no way for his immediate practical experience to make it evident to him that that which subjugates him and has the attribute of relating him socially is the product of his own action as a free individual. Such a contradiction could only appear to him as absurd, if he could even conceive it. Therefore, he can only think that the attribute that things have as commodities cannot arise from his own action as a free individual. It must lie in the nature of those things themselves. It must be an attribute of the things that has been placed in them, not by his own action as a free individual, but by nature, just as things have weight, color, density, etc. His commodity confronts him as a fetish, that is, as an inanimate object to which the person attributes certain powers over himself, as if these arose from the nature of the object and not from the voluntary action of the individual who made it a fetish.

The consciousness and will of the free individual, that is, the thought process that recognizes its own determination as the organizer of the subject's participation in the process of social metabolism, thus carry the fetishistic inversion as the negation itself of their own content. In other words, the consciousness and will of the free individual have, as an essential moment intrinsic to them, a thought process that imposes itself behind the back of objective knowledge of their own determinations and that, as such, triggers the subject's action as the negation itself of their objective will.

It is already quite enough for the commodity producer to have to see himself and act as an absolutely independent individual, in order to make it so that from this action his social interdependence arises. He has to act as a social subject, as if this action were an absolute attribute of his independence. But he can only be certain that he has acted as a social subject when the result of this seemingly independent action comes into contact, for better or worse, with the no less apparently independent will of others. Thus, in order to avoid the useless expenditure of his individual share of social labor power to produce value, the commodity producer must direct his individual work by applying his five senses as a free individual to

anticipating the decisions of others' wills. His apparent absolute independence, from which he cannot detach himself in order to act as a social subject, is presented to him in this way, clashing within his own consciousness with submission to the arbitrariness of others.

Just as it seems to him that commodities are interchangeable as equivalents by nature, the commodity producer sees himself as a naturally free individual. But the exercise of his natural individual freedom presents itself to him as having an external limit to his person, namely, the disposition by others of their own free individualities. As the saying goes, one's freedom ends where another's begins. Thus, his social interdependence presents itself to his individual, independent consciousness, which must bear that interdependence as the question of his 'ought-to-be' as a free individual equal to others. This ought-to-be must appear as an inherent attribute of the free individual personality. At the same time, it must appear as an attribute externally inherent in the exercise of the free individual personality. The rights and obligations of the free individual are nothing other than this contradiction resolved, in the eyes of the consciousness alienated in the commodity that stops at the appearance of being an abstractly free consciousness. His social being presents itself to him as emerging from an abstract condition of being a free individual who relates externally to other free individuals, insofar as each of them is the natural bearer of equal rights and obligations.

First of all, in a practical way, this concrete determination of the social being of the commodity producer takes the form of the moral ought of the free individual, of their moral conscience. But as is inherent to it for being the concrete form of a social relation that is established externally to individuals through things, moral conscience itself needs to present itself as an objective external existence, as a thing. Thus, it presents itself as "morality." The consciousness of the commodity producer takes another step in its alienation, turning this appearance of its social being into a theoretical conception of the very natural character of the moral ought of the free individual that determines their social being, that is, into philosophy. The moral ought thus appears naturalized as ethics. And since social interdependence is realized through the apparent affirmation of each one as an abstractly free individual, the ideological inversion is completed with the appearance that the very condition of being a free individual stems from the realization of that natural existence in itself which — it is postulated — is ethics.

It is clear that, as soon as this concrete form of alienated consciousness is not sufficient for the individual to realize the determinations of their social interdependence through their personal independence — that is, if they deviate from their moral duty in a way that transcends the established social unit indirectly — their social interdependence presents itself to them in a concrete form, whose character, external to their free individuality, is much more forceful: justice, which administers law as a directly social authority.[1] Since they have not behaved in accordance with the moral duty of a free individual, justice materially deprives them of their freedom, not to punish them for their failing, it is said, but until they are rehabilitated in their natural condition as a free individual, learning to behave as such. All of this, of course, subject to the fact that, in a society where the general social relationship takes the form of a thing that

[1] Later we will see the specific way in which free individuals establish this direct relationship with each other.

can be carried in your pocket, everything is bought and sold, starting with morality and justice.

Liberty, equality, morality, ethics, and justice are not natural emanations of the 'human spirit.' They are concrete forms of the general social relationship, historically specific, of commodity producers. Marx summarizes it in the following terms:

> Equality and freedom are not only respected in this way in the exchange based on exchange values, but the exchange of exchange values is the real productive foundation of all equality and freedom. As pure ideas, equality and freedom are mere idealized expressions of that foundation; developed in legal, political, and social relationships, they are only that foundation raised to another power.[2]

The inherent contradiction in his social being as a producer of commodities—that is, his full freedom regarding the individual character of his labor and his absolute lack of freedom regarding the social character of his labor—takes shape within his consciousness and will as a constantly renewed contradiction that appears to him as a tear in his very personality as a free individual. He does not know how to act except by making his apparent absolute independence clash, within his own consciousness and will, with his no less absolute apparent external dependence.

The private execution of social labor carries with it the waste of social labor power that is expended in concrete forms, which later manifest as socially useless. But it also entails the enormous waste of social labor power due to the exertion of vital energy, caused by the fact that consciousness and will must govern every action of the individual as a social subject through the specific clash in question.

8.2 The scientific consciousness of the commodity producer that starts from naturalizing their freedom

Let us move from the common consciousness of the commodity producer to their scientific consciousness. Science is the form of knowledge that penetrates the immediate appearances presented to common consciousness in order to understand the determinations of one's own actions, that is, one's own determinations as a subject, in their objective materiality. As such, it is the form of consciousness that gives the individual greater control over the productive powers of their labor. Therefore, it is the fullest form of free consciousness and will. Conversely, scientific consciousness can only be immediately developed as such by individuals who possess mastery over their own consciousnesses and wills, that is, by free individuals. It is no coincidence that the incipient development of science in societies dominated by personal relations of subordination was subsumed within the production of religious consciousness, that

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[2] Karl Marx, Grundrisse of the Critique of Political Economy (Draft) 1857-1858, Berliṇ: Dietz Verlag, 1953, p. 156, own translation. It should be noted that both the translation by Scaron published by Siglo XXI and that by Roces published by Fondo de Cultura Económica introduce a 'and,' nonexistent in the original, between 'legal, political relations' and 'social,' which makes the first two appear as if they were alternatives opposed to their own kind of social relations.

is, of conceptions that naturalize these relations by transforming them into fantastic determinations devoid of objective coherence.

It might seem that the fetishism of commodities would collapse as soon as it came under the scrutiny of scientific knowledge. But the matter is far from being so simple. For the commodity producer, science naturally appears as a theoretical representation, a representation of the concrete constructed according to an objective ideal necessity, a logic. And logic tells him that every concrete existence must be represented scientifically as a simple immediate affirmation: what is, is. Therefore, the idea that his free consciousness is the way his alienated consciousness manifests itself appears to the commodity producer as logically absurd. Free consciousness is free consciousness and alienated consciousness is alienated consciousness. At most, if one considers using a materialist dialectical logic, one can conceive of these two consciousnesses as two poles that assert themselves in a mutually exclusive manner, in an irreducible relationship of mutual antagonism. But just as in this case the concrete consciousness of the producer can be conceived as the struggle between his free consciousness and his alienated consciousness, free consciousness continues to be conceived as something external to alienated consciousness and vice versa. Once again, it is logically inconceivable that free consciousness is the concrete form of the existence of alienated consciousness.[3]

8.3 Psychoanalytic Theory

8.3.1 Freud

Based on the method in question, the science aimed at the theoretical representation of the consciousness of the commodity producer, psychoanalytic theory, conceives the specific determinations of that consciousness as if they were inherent to the nature of the human mind. The immediate appearance of absolute individual independence opens the way, conceived as a primary psychic instance. It is represented inverted in the form of an abstract, absolute natural independence that points to the reproduction of free individuality, empty of any social being, namely, the id. In Freud's words:[4]

> The oldest of these psychic provinces or instances we call the id; it contains everything that is inherited, innate, constitutionally established, that is to say, above all, the instincts originating in the somatic organization, which attain (in the id) a first psychic expression. [...] The power of the id expresses the true life purpose of the individual

[3] I have developed the issue of the scientific method as a necessary form of free consciousness carrying alienation in Juan Iñigo Carrera, *El capital: historical reason, revolutionary subject, and consciousness*, Buenos Aires: Ediciones Imago Mundi, 2013, chap. 7.

[4] Luis López Ballesteros, translator of Freud's Complete Works published by Editorial Biblioteca Nueva, which will be cited, translates the German word «Trieb» as 'instinct'. He agrees on this term with The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud carried out by James Strachey. In contrast, Jose L. Etcheverry, translator of the Complete Works published by Amorrortu editors, uses the term 'drive', which has been endorsed by Lacan. As will be seen, any specific distinction that might exist between 'drive' and 'instinct' is irrelevant to the issue at stake here.

organism: to satisfy its innate needs.[5]

> We give these physical needs, insofar as they represent stimuli of psychic activity, the name of instincts. Such instincts fill the id, and it can be stated synthetically that all the energy of the id comes from them. [...] What do instincts demand? Satisfaction; that is, the creation of situations in which somatic needs can be appeased. [...] Here speaks a domain of the pleasure principle. [...] The instincts of the id tend toward a blind and immediate satisfaction,...[6]

The degree of naturalization is such that the appearance of immediate independence of the commodity producers, who take their historically specific general social relationship as individuals lacking direct personal ties, is represented as if it were the expression of an abstract animality, an abstract instinct or drive.[7]

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[5] Sigmund Freud, Compendium of Psychoanalysis, In: Complete Works. Vol. 3, Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva Publishing, 1973, pp. 3380-3381.

[6] Sigmund Freud, Lay Analysis (Psychoanalysis and Medicine), In: Complete Works, vol. 3, Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva Publishing. 1973, p. 2921

[7] The temporal limitation of individual life and the continuity of the life of the species in its reproduction from one generation of individuals to another are the most concrete and powerful form of developing the living subject's ability to appropriate their environment. Human beings are distinguished as a genus from animal species by the way this development is directed through the transformation of the environment into a medium produced for human life by labor. Therefore, this generic human being is an attribute carried within the productive subjectivity of each individual, but it is not an abstract attribute of that subjectivity; rather, it is an attribute of the social character of labor. And, regarding the specific issue at hand here, it is the social character of labor as a projection of productive potentials from one generation to another. But when consciousness, imprisoned by the appearances of commodity production, begins to naturalize the appearance of the individually abstractly free person, the very necessity of individuality, temporally limited as a bearer of the development of generic potentials, presents itself as just another abstract instinctive determination, inherent to the individual personality. Thus, psychoanalytic theory takes this appearance, representing on one hand the social necessity of transformative development carried within individual subjectivity, as an abstract 'life instinct.' On the other hand, it represents the negation of that transformative capacity when it is borne by an individual whose social productive potentials have been mutilated, as a 'death instinct' (Sigmund Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle, In: Complete Works, vol. 3, Madrid: Editorial Biblioteca Nueva, 1973, pp. 2507–2541).
Shortly afterwards, Freud repeats the same approach in a concise manner:

> Based on theoretical reflections, supported by Biology, we assumed the existence of a death instinct, whose mission is to return all animated organic matter to the inanimate state, in opposition to Eros, whose aim is to complicate life and thus preserve it, through an ever-broader synthesis of living substance, divided into particles. Both instincts act in a strictly conservative manner, tending toward the reconstitution of a state disturbed by the genesis of life; a genesis that would be the cause both of the continuation of life and of the tendency toward death. In turn, life would be a struggle and a transaction between both tendencies (Sigmund Freud, The "I" and the "It," In: Complete Works, vol. 3, Madrid: Editorial Biblioteca Nueva, 1973, p. 2717).

With the conception of the id, the apparent absolute independence of the commodity producer has been represented as if it were the basic natural instance, devoid of any social being, of the human psyche. Then comes the moment to incorporate into the representation the naturalization of social interdependence under the proper appearance of commodity production. Above all, this interdependence must enter as a force originally alien to the human subject, which must impose itself over their abstract natural individual independence. But, at

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It is remarkable how, in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," Freud crudely reverses the inherent need of the living subject to develop their potentials to appropriate the environment, as if it were a circumstance violently imposed on the living subject from the outside. This only reflects the appearance characteristic of the commodity producer, insofar as the productive forces of their social labor present themselves as powers beyond their control, imposed from outside with the violence that submitting to them is a condition for the reproduction of their seemingly independent individual life process:

> If, therefore, all organic instincts are conservative and historically acquired, and tend toward regression or a reconstruction of the past, we must attribute all the successes of organic evolution to external, disruptive, and diverting influences. The elementary animated being would not have wished to transform itself from its beginning and would always have repeated, under identical conditions, one and the same vital path. But ultimately there is always the evolutionary history of our Earth and its relationship to the Sun, which has left its mark on the evolution of organisms. Conservative organic instincts have received each of these forced transformations of the life course, preserving them for repetition, and thus have to produce the deceptive impression of forces that tend toward transformation and progress, whereas in reality they aim only to reach an ancient end by paths both old and new. This ultimate end of all organic tendency could also be indicated. That the end of life would be a state never previously attained would be in contradiction with Nature, the preserver of instincts. This end must rather be an ancient state, a starting state, which the animated once left and toward which it tends through all the detours of evolution. If, as experience shows, without any exception, we must accept that all living things die due to internal foundations, returning to the inorganic, we can say: the goal of all life is death (Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle, op. cit., pp. 2525-2526).

In contrast, Marx begins by discovering individual life as the concrete form of generic life, as well as the inversion this determination undergoes due to the alienation of labor:

> Man makes his very vital activity the object of his will and his consciousness. He has conscious vital activity [...]. Conscious vital activity immediately distinguishes man from animal vital activity. Precisely, and only for that reason, he is a generic being. Or, in other words, he is only a conscious being, that is, his own life is only an object for him, because he is a generic being. Only for that reason is his activity free. Alienated labor inverts the relationship, so that man, precisely because he is a conscious being, makes his vital activity, his essence, a mere means for his existence [... for his physical existence.]
> ... The individual is a social being. His vital exteriorization [...] is thus an exteriorization and affirmation of social life. Individual life and the generic life of man are not distinct,
> ... Death seems to be a harsh victory of the species over the individual and contradicts the unity of both; but the determined individual is only a determined generic being and, as such, mortal (Karl Marx, Manuscripts: Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts. Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1968, pp. 111-113 and 146-147).

the same time, this social interdependence needs to appear embodied in the individual's own subjectivity. It is no coincidence that the free consciousness of the commodity producer is the concrete form of their alienated consciousness. Psychoanalytic theory represents the determination in question as the development of a portion of that purely individual being, namely, the id, into a second psychic instance. This second instance is then conceived as the affirmation of purely independent individuality, which at the same time is conditioned by carrying within itself the affirmation of social interdependence as an external imposition, which it must satisfy in order to satisfy itself. It is, therefore, an instance presented as the bearer of the necessarily contradictory consciousness and will of the commodity producer, as if it were an inherent attribute of human subjectivity itself, namely, the ego:

> We know that the pleasure principle corresponds to a primary functioning of the psychic apparatus and that it is useless, and even highly dangerous, for the organism's self-assertion in the face of the difficulties of the external world. Under the influence of the instinct of self-preservation, the pleasure principle is replaced by the reality principle, which, without abandoning the goal of ultimately attaining pleasure, requires and achieves the postponement of satisfaction and the renunciation of some of the possibilities of attaining it, and forces us to patiently endure displeasure during the long detour necessary to reach pleasure.[8]
>
> When the instinctual aspirations of the id do not find satisfaction, intolerable states arise. Experience quickly shows that such situations of satisfaction can only be achieved with the help of the external world, and then the part of the id turned toward that external world comes into play, that is, the ego. ... The instincts of the id aim for blind and immediate satisfaction; but on their own, they would never achieve it, instead creating opportunities for serious harm. It is the ego's role to prevent such failure, acting as a mediator between the demands of the id and those of the real external world. ... By thus taming the impulses of the id, it replaces the pleasure principle, which previously dominated alone, with the so-called reality principle, which, although it pursues the same goals, does so by taking into account the conditions imposed by the external world.[9]
>
> It is easily seen that the ego is a part of the Id modified by the influence of the external world, [...] The ego strives in turn to convey to the Id this influence of the external world and aims to replace the pleasure principle, which reigns unchecked in the Id, with the reality principle. Perception is to the ego what instinct is to the Id. The ego represents what we might call reason or reflection, in opposition to the Id, which contains the passions.[10]

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[8] Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle, op. cit., p. 2509.

[9] Freud, Lay Analysts (Psychoanalysis and Medicine)1 op. cit., p. 2921.

[10] Freud, The 'ego' and the 'id', op. cit., p. 2708.

Once psychoanalytic theory has inverted the social being by conceiving it as external limits to the abstract natural freedom that are carried within individual subjectivity itself, it needs to conceive the way in which the transition occurs from that initial abstract exteriority to the interiority of the self. It would then seem that even its own inversions would force it to confront the concrete form in which the general social interdependence presents itself to the commodity producer, that is, the commodity as the bearer of the powers of social labor. But, as corresponds to its condition as a logical representation, for psychoanalytic theory, consciousness is consciousness and the commodity is the commodity. Thus, it is powerless to see in the commodity the objectified form taken by the general social relation alienated from immediately free individuals. The social interdependence of these individuals must be removed from the commodity and represented as opposed to its true content. Psychoanalytic theory then represents it as a determination imposed externally on individuals through the direct relationships they actually establish with each other as personifications of their commodities, set up as if they were abstract direct relations between people. The general social relationship through things is thus represented as its opposite, namely, as a direct relationship between people, in which abstract individual freedom is externally curtailed by the domination that other individuals impose on it. But another step in the inversion is still missing. Commodity producers are not subject to relations of personal dependence because they are subject to their objectified social relation. For this reason, their free consciousness is the concrete form of their consciousness alienated in the commodity. Therefore, their alienation is not carried in the person of other producers, but in the free consciousness of each individual. Consequently, the psychoanalytic representation must now transform the apparent dependence exerted externally by other people into the very condition of the individual's free consciousness. The apparent external dependence on others is now represented as internalized, as a social "ought" that the individual has introduced into themselves from the outside to detach it from all personal subordination, namely, the superego.

> Already in these older renunciations to instinct, a psychological factor intervenes, which also plays a very important role in all subsequent ones.... One of the characteristics of our evolution consists in the gradual transformation of external coercion into internal coercion through the action of a special psychic instance of man, the superego, which gradually incorporates external coercion among its commandments. In every child, we can observe the process of this transformation, which is what makes him a moral and social being.[11]
>
> You will guess that the superego is the foundation of that phenomenon we call moral conscience. For mental health, it is very important that the superego is normally developed; that is, that it has become sufficiently impersonal, which is precisely not the case in the neurotic, whose Oedipus complex has not undergone the necessary transformation.[12]

[11] Sigmund Freud, The Future of an Illusion, In: Complete Works, vol. 3 Madrid: Editorial Biblioteca Nueva, 1973, p. 2965

[12] Freud, Secular Analysis (Psychoanalysis and Medicine), op. cit., p. 2936.

Psychoanalytic theory has already conceived as generically inherent to human subjectivity, on the one hand, the appearance of being free from the commodity producer, and on the other hand, the appearance of its social interdependence as a power external to it that, nevertheless, this same producer carries within himself in his condition as a free individual. In this naturalization, conscious and voluntary action has been represented as the mediation of the ego in the ongoing struggle between supposed abstract natural freedom, represented by the id, and the supposed social interdependence external to the individual being but which he carries within himself, represented by the superego. The contradiction inherent in free consciousness, which faces the product of its own action as an external power that not only escapes its control but also controls it, is thus represented as a determination inherent to human subjectivity under the name of "anxiety":

> The poor ego appears even more troubled: it serves three harsh masters and strives to reconcile their demands and commands. These demands always differ, and sometimes seem irreconcilable; it is therefore no wonder that the ego so often fails in its task. Its three masters are the external world, the superego, and the id. If we consider the efforts of the ego to please them at the same time—or, better said, to obey them simultaneously—we will no longer regret having personified it and presented it as a separate being. It feels besieged from three sides and threatened by three dangers to which, under extreme pressure, it responds with the development of anxiety... In this way, driven by the id, restricted by the superego, and opposed by reality, the ego struggles to carry out its economic mission, that of establishing harmony between the forces and influences acting within it and upon it; and we understand why, at times, we cannot help exclaiming: 'How difficult life is!' When the ego has to acknowledge its weakness, it becomes overwhelmed by anxiety—real anxiety before the external world, moral anxiety before the superego, and neurotic anxiety before the force of the passions within the id.[13]

In a superimposed construction, Freud represents the unity of the thought process with which the commodity producer governs the exercise of their general social relation, that is, their consciousness, as if it were naturally split into two domains. This split is maintained through the inversion of the relationship between consciousness and will. The latter ceases to be the form in which action governed by the former is realized, and comes to be conceived as that which curtails the very existence of consciousness. On the one hand, only the process of appropriating the potential of one's own action is recognized as consciousness insofar as this process appears to be governed by a will of the subject abstracted from all alienation. On the other hand, insofar as the very process of organizing one's own action confronts the subject as the bearer of a potential that escapes their control and dominates them, it is represented as the abstract negation of consciousness, that is, as the unconscious:

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[13] S1gmund Freud, New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, In: Complete Works, vol. 3, Madrid: Editorial Biblioteca Nueva, 1973, pp. 3144-3145.

> It is well known that a large number of people argue, against the claim of absolute psychic determinism, that they have an intense feeling of conviction in the existence of free will... After our analyses, there is no need to dispute the right to the feeling of conviction in the existence of free will. If we distinguish conscious motivation from unconscious motivation, this conscious feeling of conviction does not extend to all our motor decisions... But what is thus free on this side receives its motivation from the other side, from the unconscious; and in this way, determination in the psychic realm is achieved without any interruption.[14]

Then, Freud brings both constructions together through the representation of how the unity of the free consciousness that carries alienation operates, its dynamics, as if it governed the subject's actions based on the cleavage of these two constituent domains. On one hand, the unconscious represents the determinations that appear to the subject as their own powers, which at the same time are alien to them and escape their free control; on the other hand, the conscious represents the determinations that present themselves to the subject as powers that they freely control by understanding their necessity, through which flows the resolution between the abstract absolute natural independence and the abstract internalized social interdependence carried by the instances of the id, the ego, and the superego:

> Everything that happens in the id is and remains unconscious, and only the processes developed in the ego can become conscious. But not all of them, not always or necessarily, since very significant parts of the ego can remain unconscious for a long time.[15]
>
> The story of the genesis of the superego shows us that the old conflicts of the ego, with the object-charges of the Id, can continue being transformed into conflicts with the superego, heir of the Id... the extensive communication of the ego ideal with unconscious instinctual feelings explains to us the enigma of how the ideal can remain largely unconscious and inaccessible to the ego.[16]
>
> Yes; considerable parts of the ego and the superego can remain unconscious and normally are. This means that the subject knows nothing about their contents, and a strenuous effort is needed to make them conscious. It is true, indeed, that the ego and the conscious, the repressed and the unconscious do not coincide.[17]

Thus, the commodity producer leaves the psychoanalytic consultation scientifically convinced that his behavior is necessarily contradictory as a result of his full social interdependence being realized through his full personal independence—that is, that his free consciousness is the concrete form in which his alienated consciousness is realized—is a condition as natural as to fit into the pathology-therapy scheme, just like a broken bone or the

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[14] Sigmund Freud. Psychopathology of Everyday Life, In Complete Works, vol. 1. Mądrid: Editorial Biblioteca Nueva, 1973, pp. 915-916.

[15] Freud, Profane Analysis (Psychoanalysis and Medicine), op. cit., p. 2920.

[16] Freud. The 'ego' and the 'id', op. cit., p. 2716.

[17] Freud. New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, op. cit., p. 3140.

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[18] This does not take away from the fact that psychoanalytic therapy has a remarkable effect on the way the interested party regulates their actions. Not because it advances the overcoming of the alienated character of consciousness by confronting it with its true determination, but because it operates by reproducing the alienation itself through the purely unconscious process of transference:

> The factor that determines the outcome is no longer the patient's intellectual introspection, a faculty that lacks sufficient energy and freedom for this purpose, but solely their attitude toward the doctor. If their transference is positive, it will endow the doctor with great authority, and the patient will regard their instructions and opinions as worthy of belief. On the other hand, those patients in whom this is absent or whose transference is negative pay no attention to the doctor at all. Belief in the therapist here reproduces the very history of the patient's development.... In this way, it turns out that a person is generally not accessible through their intellectual side, but in proportion to their capacity for libidinal infvestment in objects (Sigmund Freud, Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, In: Complete Works, vol. 2, Madrid: Editorial Biblioteca Nueva, 1973, p. 2400).

The change in the way the subject of analysis governs their actions is the result of their own actions. However, the content of this change is nothing other than the ability to act as a social subject with less expenditure of vital energy and a greater application of it to the performance of social labor. Thus, to the individual themselves, it can only be presented as a change, not in their own apparent nature as an absolutely free individual, but from the point of reference of their apparent external social interdependence. Appearances that the conscious process of psychoanalysis itself has confirmed to them as objective realities. Therefore, the act of changing the way they govern their actions appears to both themselves and their therapist as if it had emerged from unconsciously changing the external figure in which social interdependence was personified: from the reference that seemed to limit the exercise of abstract individual freedom so that an appropriate social interdependence could arise from it, it has been transferred to the liberating figure of the therapist.

In its essence, we are here facing the same process of reproduction of free consciousness carrying alienation in commodities that occurs in hypnosis, suggestion, the laying on of hands, modern worship of images, fetishes, and amulets, and, above all, in the religious worship of deities (we will have an opportunity to pause on the latter later). The subject can only give course to what is nothing other than their own action, on the condition that it presents itself as the power of an existence external to them, a person or thing, to whose dominion they are subjected. The specificity of psychoanalysis is that this unconscious process is borne in its opposite, in the process of producing an objective consciousness regarding one's own determinations, carried out by the subject. That is why the mode of the process in question is particularly characteristic of individuals whose concrete work lies in the exercise of objective consciousness, that is, of those who engage in what is called intellectual work, as opposed to other forms that operate through the negation of the mediation of objective consciousness. This also explains the need for the strong determination of psychoanalytic theory as a bearer of ideology, since it must counteract its own impetus toward the development of the objective consciousness of the subject with whom it operates, lest it go too far and this consciousness ends up discovering its determination as alienated. Nevertheless, the specificity of psychoanalysis as a form of producing free consciousness blindly carrying its alienation even transcends its determination by the aforementioned materiality of labor. The fullness of its specific power develops with respect to the individual bearing the productive attributes in question who, due to the conditions presented to them transcending their individuality, confronts the exacerbated

Psychoanalytic theory has not needed to go beyond the appearances characteristic of the common consciousness of the commodity producer to conceive of abstract absolute independence as the natural starting point of human subjectivity. But how can a process of objective knowledge make the apparent form in which the commodity producer perceives their social interdependence also acquire an ahistorical character? Only in the one possible way, that is, through the annihilation of its own objectivity by resorting to myth. The moral superego—that is, social interdependence conceived as internalized by individuals following an external imposition on their natural independence—would have arisen as a reciprocal restraint as a consequence of the supposed murder of the father of the primitive horde, carried out by the other males of the same, that is, by their sons:

> The expelled brothers gathered one day, killed the father and devoured his corpse, thus putting an end to the existence of the paternal horde. Together, they undertook and accomplished what would have been impossible for them individually. ... Totemic food, perhaps the first pot of Humanity. It would be the commemorative reproduction of this criminal and memorable act that constituted the starting point of social organizations, moral restrictions and religion. To find these consequences plausible by abstracting from their premises, it is enough to admit that the rebellious fraternal horde harbored with regard to the father those same contradictory feelings which form the ambivalent content of the paternal completion in our children and in our neurotic patients. They hated the father who so violently opposed their need for power and his sexual demands, but at the same time they loved and admired him. After having suppressed him and satisfied their hatred and their desire to identify with him, the affectionate feelings, previously violently dominated by the hostile, had to impose themselves on them. As a result of this affective process, remorse arose and the consciousness of guilt was born, here confused with it, and the dead father acquired a much greater power than he had possessed in life, all circumstances that we still see today in human destiny. What the father had previously prevented, by the very fact of his existence, the children later forbade to themselves by virtue of that "retrospective obedience" characteristic of a psychic situation that psychoanalysis has made familiar to us.[19]

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contradiction between the development of their freedom insofar as they understand their determinations and the way these appear imposed from outside themselves as conditions that mutilate the exercise of their seemingly enhanced individual freedom. Thus, the specificity of psychoanalysis becomes particularly evident with respect to the petty bourgeoisie, which is overwhelmed by the advance of capital accumulation, as well as with respect to salaried workers who, having been trained for intellectual work, find themselves in an environment where the corresponding jobs do not exist. It is therefore not surprising that it is displaced by 'alternative therapies,' or 'new age' fantasies, and, at times, by the harshness of psychopharmacological treatments, whenever crises of the capitalist mode of production arise, sweeping away any possibility of rationality for the alienated consciousness that insists on seeing itself as abstractly free.

[19] Sigmund Freud, Totem and Taboo, In: Complete Works, vol. I, Madrid: Editorial Biblioteca Nueva, 1973, pp. 1838-1839.

Thus, the development of "culture," that is, the development of the process of social metabolism specifically human based on the transformation of the environment through labor, is represented as the product of the development of the superego in its effort to assert itself over the natural individual autonomy of the id.:

> But also, because each individual is virtually an enemy of civilization, despite having to acknowledge its general human interest. Indeed, the singular fact occurs that men, although it is impossible for them to exist in isolation, feel the sacrifices that civilization imposes to make communal life possible as an intolerable burden. Thus, culture must be defended against the individual, and all its commandments, organizations, and institutions respond to this defense, which are not only intended to carry out a particular distribution of natural goods but also to maintain it and even defend the existing means for the domination of Nature and the production of goods against the hostile impulses of men.
> ... This psychological fact has a decisive significance for the judgment of human culture. At first, we might have believed that its essential function was the domination of Nature to secure vital goods and that the dangers threatening it could be avoided through an adequate distribution of these goods among men. But now we see the focus of the question shift from the material to the spiritual. The decisive point is whether it is possible to reduce, and to what extent, the sacrifices imposed on men in terms of renouncing the satisfaction of their instincts, reconcile them with those that remain necessary, and compensate them for these.
> ... Even in these earliest renunciations of instinct, a psychological factor intervenes that also gains utmost importance in all subsequent renunciations. It is inaccurate to claim that the human soul has made no progress since the most primitive times and that, in contrast to the progress of science and technology, it is today the same as at the beginning of History. We can point out here one such spiritual progress. One of the characteristics of our evolution consists in the gradual transformation of external coercion into internal coercion through the action of a special psychic faculty of man, the superego, which incorporates external coercion into its commandments. In every age we can observe the process of this transformation, which is what makes him a moral and social being. This strengthening of the superego is one of the most valuable psychological cultural factors. Those individuals in whom it has taken effect cease to be adversaries of civilization and become its most steadfast foundations. The greater their number in a cultural sector, the more secure it will be, and the sooner it can dispense with external means of coercion.[20]

The early twentieth-century Viennese petty bourgeois becomes "the man." What is the result of historical development, namely, the unnatural consciousness and will of the commodity producer, is conceived inversely as the natural cause of human history. So natural, that psychoanalytic theory ends up proclaiming the impossibility of overcoming it, even if the

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[20] Freud, The Future of an Illusion, op. cit., pp. 2962-2965

very basis of private labor as a way of organizing social labor were declared to be overcome:

> The economic critique of the communist system does not concern me; it is not possible for me to investigate whether the abolition of private property is timely and appropriate; but, on the other hand, I can recognize as a vain illusion its psychological hypothesis. It is true that by abolishing private property one removes from human aggressiveness one of its instruments, undoubtedly a very strong one, but by no means the strongest of all. However, nothing will have changed as a result in the differences of power and influence that aggressiveness exploits for its purposes; nor will the essence of aggressiveness have changed.... the inexhaustible intrinsic tendencies of human nature would not cease to follow them either.[21]

8.3.2 Lacan

Within psychoanalytic theory itself, Lacan objects to the appeal to myth as a real historical origin of the form of consciousness represented as the conscious-unconscious unity.[22] He places the emergence of language in its stead. From then on, this form of consciousness has been considered as eternal as human language itself. Let us then pause to analyze the concrete determinations of language.

Let's start, once again, from the beginning. The human life process is a process of social metabolism based on labor. That is, it is a process of metabolism where the productive expenditure of a human individual's body results in the reproduction of another individual's body as a human being. This reproduction can reach its recipient both in their immediate individual subjectivity (when it involves the consumption of a means of subsistence) and in their subjectivity as a producer for others (when it involves the consumption of a means of production, W1). Therefore, it is a process of cooperation in which the productive forces that arise from it, that is, the productive forces of social labor, take shape in the individual productive subjectivities. The way in which individual productive subjectivities are coordinated as bearers of the productive forces of social labor constitutes the starting point of the social being of human individuals.

Every form of living existence has the natural need to expand its capacity to appropriate the environment in which it finds itself. The specifically human way of fulfilling this need consists of expanding the capacity to transform the environment into a means for oneself through labor; that is, it consists of the development of the productive forces of social labor embodied in individual productive subjectivities. This process, that is to say, the development of individuals' social being, is the process of human natural history.

The action in which living beings appropriate their environment has a first stage that consists of the limited expenditure of the body to appropriate the potential that whole action can have in relation to the potentiality of its environment. This action of knowing one’s own potential in relation to that of the environment, that is, the process of knowledge, is in itself the

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[21] Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents. In: Complete Works. Vol. 3, Madrid: Editorial Biblioteca Nueva, 1973, p. 3047.

[22] Jacques Lacan, 'On Psychic Causality,' in Supplement of Writings. Barcelona: Argot, 1984, p. 96.

process of organizing action. The organization of the human labor process, and therefore of the human process of social metabolism, has its historical origin in merely animal knowledge. In the development of the productive forces of social labor, merely animal knowledge develops into human consciousness, that is, into knowledge capable of governing one's own individual labor as part of social labor because one possesses that knowledge. Individual labor governed in this way then takes the form of voluntary action.

In turn, the coordination of collective action takes concrete form in the reciprocal externalization of the social being that each person carries within their individual subjectivity. The organization of the social metabolism process thus takes concrete form in a process of reciprocal communication through which individuals coordinate their individual work within the unity of social labor, and this process is nothing more than the reciprocal externalization of the social being of the individuals communicating with each other. The process of human metabolism begins organized through simply animal relationships and, as a concrete form of these, through communication via systems of signs. But in its development as a consciously and voluntarily organized process, human labor transcends the reach of any system of signs that cannot externalize the increasingly complex connection of the potentialities of subjects and objects, which organizes joint action. The coordination of individual productive subjectivities through the externalization of their social being gradually takes concrete form as a language—that is, a system of verbal signs that carry the breadth of increasingly complex meanings with which consciousness operates. And when the complexity of conscious connection advances to the point of needing to take on an objective external existence that transcends the very moment of verbal sign emission, these develop as written signs. In summary, language is the form of social relation in which individual conscious subjectivities coordinate their action as organs of the process of social metabolism.

The overcoming of the mere non-verbal sign by a system of verbal and written signs carrying the organized thought of joint action—or, in other words, a system of signifiers carrying meanings, as they are commonly called since Saussure—is an essential leap in the development of the productive forces of social labor. But this is not a leap whose significance ends with itself. On the contrary, it extends its reach indefinitely forward, as it is the product of consciousness through which consciousness itself gives substance to its development as the capability to organize the voluntary action that transforms the environment into a medium for human life. Language is a social relationship, and its forms—that is, the very relationship between meanings and the signifiers that carry them—are historically determined ways in which the process of social metabolism is organized. Moreover, language is the necessary form of scientific thought, that is, of human knowledge of its own determinations in the objectivity of these. Therefore, it is the concrete necessary form that the general social relation would take in a society whose organization is based on the objective knowledge by each individual of their own individual determination as a concrete organ of the productive forces of social labor. That is, of a process of social metabolism where each individual subjectivity carries its social being in the form of a fully objective consciousness. To put it plainly, of a society that would be the opposite of the capitalist mode of production, where one's own social being presents itself to individuals as the attribute of a thing.

Let's see, then, how Lacan confronts the determinations of language. To begin with,

instead of seeing the emergence of language as the realization of a generically human nature that enhances the capacity to satisfy human needs, he sees it as the external negation of an abstract naturalness, which leaves that capacity lacking:

> The man is indeed possessed by the discourse of the law, and with it he is punished, in the name of that symbolic debt which he never stops paying increasingly in his neurosis. How can this capture be established, how does man enter into this law, which is foreign to him, with which, as an animal, he has nothing to do? To explain this, Freud constructs the myth of the murder of the father.[23]

The very way of expressing oneself, the 'capture,' the 'entry' into the 'law,' which is 'alien,' reveals that Lacan starts from conceiving the human being as a subject who has lost what was their natural freedom, to be subjected to a social domination imposed from outside that naturalness. As soon as the first step is taken, we already face the inversion of the determinations of discourse and, therefore, of language, which corresponds to the consciousness of the producer of commodities. Anyway, let's continue. In contrast to Freud, Lacan focuses on discourse. But he does not do so simply in a generic way, but with reference to its concrete system structure of signifiers:

> There is in man a signifier that points to his relationship with the signified, and that is called the superego.[24]

From being a historically determined social relationship, and, therefore, a product that each generation transforms by developing the productive forces of social labor, Lacan inverts language as an existence that precedes the constitution of every social relationship, which precedes a history whose future is already present in a completed manner in its very starting point:

> What I am now putting at the beginning of the analytical experience is the notion that there are already established and structured signifiers. There is already a central system built and functioning. You did not make it. This central system is language, in operation for as long as you can remember. Literally, you cannot remember any further. I am referring to the history of humanity as a whole. Since there are signifiers in operation, subjects are organized in their psyche by the very play of those signifiers.[25]

Language is the most concrete and powerful form in which the exercise of consciousness takes shape. Therefore, in the capitalist mode of production, it is the most concrete and powerful form in which the exercise of free consciousness takes shape, which is such because it carries its own alienation as an attribute of the social powers of the commodity, that is, the

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[23] Jacques Lacan, The Seminar. Book 3. Psychoses, 1955-1956, Barcelona: Paidós, 1984, p. 349.
[24] Jacques Lacan, The Seminar. Book 4. The Object Relation, 1956-1957, Barcelona: Paidos, 1994, p. 214
[25] Ibid, p. 52.

exercise of a consciousness that objectively confronts its own social powers as if they were foreign to it. Thus, within the individual subjectivity of the commodity producer, language operates in the indissoluble unity of being the vehicle for affirming the individual's control over themselves, which is, in itself, the negation of that control. Lacan takes this indissoluble unity and represents it to himself as split into two courses of language determination whose reciprocal externality is interrupted by the eruption of one into the other:

> The unconscious, according to Freud, is a chain of signifiers that somewhere (in another setting he writes) repeats and persists to interfere with the gaps offered by effective discourse and the thinking that he describes.[26]

As in Freud, on the one hand, there is no more consciousness than that which remains shaped by the assertion of an abstractly free will, which dominates the construction of "effective discourse and the thought it informs." On the other hand, the alienation that constitutes the content of free consciousness is represented as if it had its own existence, formed as the negation of that "conscious" cut out by abstractly free will. It is about the unconscious, whose "chain of signifiers" "interferes" with the exercise of the conscious. There is no other dialectic here than that which Marx calls the petty-bourgeois dialectic of "on the one hand" and "on the other hand." Thanks to it, language has gone from being a necessary concrete form of consciousness to being that which, by its very form, enables the existence of the "unconscious" in opposition to consciousness.

The consciousness of the commodity producer, which has been abstracted from its alienated content, comes to be represented as a consciousness that dominates its determinations by itself and, therefore, as a naturally free consciousness. In turn, the alienation that has been represented as the pure negation of that consciousness appears as having no way of being constitutive of that free subjectivity. It appears as if it could only have been imposed on it from the outside and, therefore, is conceived as the mutilation of naturalized free subjectivity:

> In the approach I began to take, the I appears first before the Other as that which allows the delimitation of a logical weakness, as the site of an original defect that the word

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[26] Jacques Lacan, Writings 2, Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 1988, p. 779. Essentially, this entire conception, which places language abstracted in itself as the determinant of the course of human life, is nothing but an idealist inversion. An inversion that becomes crudely visible in the cited paragraph, in the form that something 'is' because someone conceived it that way in thought. And, as is typical of conceptions of this kind, it is not surprising that it culminates in delirious incoherences:

> Marx, if he had not accounted for that surplus of enjoyment due to his insistence on castrating himself, if he had not turned it into surplus value, in other words, if he had not founded capitalism, would have realized that surplus value is the surplus of enjoyment. None of this, of course, prevents capitalism from having been founded by him and the function of surplus value from being completely appropriately designated in terms of its devastating consequences (Jacques Lacan, The Seminar. Book 17. The Other Side of Psychoanalysis, 1969-1970, Barcelona: Paidós, 1992, p. 113).

> carries insofar as it could respond. The I appears as subjected, as subject. I wrote this word somewhere to designate the subject insofar as it is only produced divided in discourse.[27]

Through language, Lacan situates in "the Other" the exteriority that he has conceived as the origin of the mutilation of naturally free subjectivity. As is obvious, the organization of conscious collective action takes concrete form when the meaning carried in the signifier emitted by one is recognized as such content by the other. In their condition as individual organs of the process of social metabolism, the social being of the emitter constitutes an inseparable unity with the social being of the receiver. This determination is immediately visible regarding the consciousness of individuals who coordinate their process of social metabolism through direct ties of personal dependence. There, every individual subject presents themselves carrying as an attribute that determines their condition as a person, and therefore as an attribute that is naturally their own, their interdependence with others. And insofar as these direct personal relationships take on the character of the subordination of the consciousness and will of some individuals to those of others, it becomes clear in which direction the course of meaning flows. By contrast, in the capitalist mode of production, producers of commodities appear devoid of any social being that is personally their own. Their social interdependence is presented in their apparent absolute mutual independence, so that when the necessity inherent to the unity of the social metabolism process takes concrete form in the word emitted by one, it seems that such necessity contains no more potentiality than what the other's abstractly free individual will arbitrarily assigns to it:

> Isn't this where we should look, in that which possesses us, possesses us as a subject, which is nothing other than a desire, and, moreover, is the desire of the Other, a desire by which we are alienated from the very beginning?[28]

Lacan emphasizes that he conceives of 'desire' as the expression of a will, that of the other, which asserts itself in its abstract absolute freedom:

> Desire is sketched on the margin where demand tears itself away from need: a margin that is opened by demand—whose call cannot be unconditional but must be directed to the Other—under the form of the possible gap that need can provide, due to the lack of universal satisfaction (what is commonly called: anxiety). A margin that, no matter how linear it may be, lets its vertigo appear, so long as it is not covered by the elephantine trampling of the Other's whim.[29]

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[27] Jacques Lacan, The Seminar. Book 16. From One Other to the Other, 1968-1969, Buenos Aires: Paidos, 2008, p. 73

[28] Jacques Lacan, (1973-1974), "The Non-Dupes Err" (Seminar 21), unpublished (translation by Irene M. Agoff de Ramos, technical review by Evaristo Ramos), Buenos Aires Freudian School, File no. 16, Series I, 2, part two, 1977, p. 39

[29] Lacan, Écrits 2, op. cit., "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious," p. 793

Thus, it conceives the organization of social interdependence as a necessity that must be imposed externally over the apparent absolute individual freedom:

> It is this whim, however, that introduces the ghost of Omnipotence not of the subject, but of the Other where its demand is established [...], and with that ghost comes the need for its restraint by the law.[30]

As much as Lacan has been reversing the appearances presented by the social relationship among producers of commodities, based on conceiving it as a simple direct relationship between people, at this point he cannot avoid confronting the evidence that the alienated character of the relationship in question is based on an equality that transcends the individuals involved. First of all, since these are mutually free individuals, the assignment of meaning to the other's signifier becomes a back-and-forth movement that leaves the people themselves, as subjects of their relationship with each other, reduced to the condition of mere signifiers:

> The registration of the signifier is established by the fact that a signifier represents a subject for another signifier. It is the structure—dream, slip, and witty remark—of all the formations of the unconscious. And it is also what explains the original division of the subject... It is not, therefore, that this operation takes its starting point in the Other, which is what leads it to be labeled as alienation. That the Other is, for the subject, the place of its signifying cause merely explains why no subject can be the cause of itself[31]

Then, what is manifested in the social relationship that commodity-producing people establish among themselves as personifications, which has language as its concrete general form, is that their respective subjectivities cannot account for the content of necessity inherent in that relationship on their own. There is clearly something missing in those subjectivities for them to be the cause of the relationship by themselves, something that operates behind their backs and dominates them; something that has an objective existence that transcends them and determines them as such subjectivities:

> The object a is that for which the speaking being, when caught in discourse, is determined. It doesn't know at all what it determines: it is the object a; in what it is determined, it is determined as a subject, that is, it is divided as a subject, it is the prey of desire.[32]

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[30] Ibid, "Subversion of the subject and dialectic of desire in the Freudian unconscious," p. 793

[31] Lacan, Writings 2, op. cit., «Position of the Unconscious. At the Bonneval congress resumed from 1960 in 1964», pp. 819-820

[32] Jacques Lacan, "The Knowledge of the Psychoanalyst. 1. Lectures by Jacques Lacan at Ste. Anne, 1971-1972," Sesgo 2, ENAPSI (Entity of Psychoanalytic Action), 1984, p. 83.

Consequently, the object that determines subjectivity presents itself to the interested parties, individuals free from any personal domination, with the fantastic attribute of exercising power over their own persons:

> Speech has its effects, from which is constituted what we call the phantasm, that is to say, the relationship between the object a, which is what is concentrated from the effect of discourse to cause desire, and that which condenses around it, like a fissure, and which is called the subject. It is a fissure because the object a is always between each of the signifiers and the one that follows.[33]

Even Lacan himself then comes to the evidence that, behind his 'object a,' behind that which 'is lacking' in people as subjects of their own social relationship and transcends them, the commodity appears:

> I stated - the signifier is what represents a subject for another signifier. It is a definition. It can be required that a definition be correct and that teaching be rigorous [...]. It is simply about this. The surplus-enjoyment is a function of the renunciation of enjoyment due to the effect of discourse. That is what gives rise to the object a. Insofar as the market defines any object of human labor as a commodity, this object carries within itself something of surplus value. Thus, the surplus-enjoyment allows isolating the function of the object a.[34]

So, what is the content of this entire theoretical construction? What Lacan does is take the historically specific form of consciousness of the commodity producer and present it as if it were the ahistorical product of human language. Under the guise of being a critique of the naturalization of the apparent freedom of the isolated individual, Lacan produces a crude naturalization of the free consciousness that is free precisely because it is alienated in the commodity. And he has no problem reaffirming this naturalization to the point of giving it a biological character:

> How can one overcome the alienation of their work? It's as if they wanted to overcome the alienation of discourse. I see nothing to overcome this alienation except the object that bears value, what Marx called, in a singularly anticipatory homonymy of psychoanalysis, the fetish, it being understood that psychoanalysis reveals its biological meaning.[35]

Behind the mask of critical discourse, the brutally reactionary claim against any possibility of overcoming the capitalist mode of production makes its way: that human beings are condemned, for as long as their speaking eternity lasts, to confront the product of their own

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[33] Jacques Lacan, The Seminar. Book 19... or Worse, 1971-197i, Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2012.
[34] Lacan, The Seminar. Book 16. From One Other to the Other, 1968-1969, op. cit., pp. 18-19.
[35] Jacques Lacan, 'Responses to Philosophy Students,' in Other Writings, Paris: Seuil, 2000, pp. 207-208, my own translation.

social powers as something that escapes their control and, even more, dominates them. And, in Lacan's words, they would do well to resign themselves to it:

> In any case, man cannot aspire to be whole (to the 'total personality,' another premise in which modern psychotherapy goes astray), from the moment the play of displacement and condensation to which he is destined in the exercise of his functions marks his relationship with the signifier.[36]

No matter how much one turns it over, beyond its operational reach as an instrument for the less exhausting everyday reproduction of free consciousness, blindly carrying its own alienation (the so-called 'clinic'), psychoanalytic theory is an ideological construction in which the fetishistic character of the commodity is expressed. It begins by naturalizing the appearances of the consciousness of the commodity producer, to represent them, coated with a veneer of objective foundation, as the necessary basis for any organization of the human process of social metabolism.[37]

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[36] Lacan, Écrits 2, op. cit., "The Signification of the Phallus", pp. 671-672.

[37] Not for nothing does Lacan agree with Smith in resorting to language to naturalize the consciousness of the commodity producer:

> It is not our purpose, for the moment, to investigate whether this propensity [to barter, exchange, and negotiate one thing for another] is one of those innate principles in human nature, for which no further explanation can be given, or whether, as seems more probable, it is the consequence of the faculty of reason and language (Adam Smith, An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations, Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1958, p. 16).

But even more remarkable is its convergence with neoclassical economics in terms of resorting to the externality of mathematical language in order to regenerate the naturalization of the commodity producer's consciousness once the historical determination of that consciousness has been revealed by Marx. Just as for Walras, according to Lacan, mathematics is the full form of scientific language:

> There has never been any thought other than symbolic, and scientific thought is the one that reduces symbolism by grounding the subject in it: this is what is called mathematics in everyday language (Lacan. Écrits 2, op. cit., 'From a posteriori Syllabary,' p. 702)

It is clear that there was a not insignificant difference between neoclassical economists and Lacan. While the neoclassicals have no idea about dialectics and Hegel, Lacan boasts about the application of the former and his knowledge of the latter's work. It is therefore appropriate to link Lacan's use of arithmetic as a full expression of the "dialectic of desire" with Hegel's conclusion—including the idealist inversion—about the scope of arithmetic when it comes to understanding concrete determinations. According to Lacan:

> It is the mere indication of that enjoyment in its infinitude that implies the mark of its prohibition, and, by constituting that mark, it implies a sacrifice: the one it covers in a single and same act with the choice of its symbol: the phallus. This choice is allowed by the fact that the phallus, that is, the image of the penis, is negativity in its place in the mirror image. This is what predestines

> the phallus to give body to enjoyment in the dialectic of desire. ...Thus the erectile organ comes to symbolize the site of enjoyment, not as such, nor even as an image, but as the missing part of the desired image: therefore it is comparable to the meaning produced above, of the enjoyment it restores via the coefficient of its statement to the function of the lack of a signifier: (-1) (ibid, p. 802)

According to Hegel:

> It is well known that Pythagoras presented rational relationships or philosophical ideas in numbers; even in modern times they have been used, along with the forms of their relationships, such as powers, etc., in philosophy in order to organize thoughts according to all this or to express them through this medium.
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> …We saw number as the absolute determination of quantity and its element as difference converted into indifference [...] Arithmetic is an analytical science, because all the connections and differences that appear in its object are not in the object itself, but are superimposed on it in a completely external manner... It not only does not contain the concept and with it the task for conceptual thinking, but is the opposite of it. Due to the indifference of what is connected with respect to the connection, which lacks necessity, thinking here is found [...] in the violent activity of moving in the absence of thought and of linking what is incapable of any necessity. The object is the abstract thought of exteriority itself.
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> …The effort consists especially in the following: to firmly hold what lacks cọncept and to combine it in a way that lacks concept. The content is the empty one; [...] The effect—when those exercises are turned into the main point and the primary occupation—can be nothing other than to empty the spirit of form and content and make it dull (Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Science of Logic, Buenos Aires: Ediciones Solar, 1976, pp. 187-191).

Chapter 9
Political Economy

9.1 Classical political economy

We now move into the realm of science whose immediate object is the indirect social relationship that commodity producers establish through exchange, that is, into the realm of science that has the commodity itself as its object, the form of value that social labor products take, the thing in which alienated consciousness is objectified. This is none other than the starting point of economic theory. Classical political economy penetrates beyond the immediate appearances presented by the exchangeability of commodities, to discover that exchange value is ultimately determined by human labor. But it halts its progress before the immediate appearance presented by labor as the determinant of value, turning this determination into an empty abstraction, devoid not only of all historical specificity but even of the materiality of the labor in question—that is, of abstract labor. It then becomes impossible for it to see in the commodity the concrete form of the general social relationship among individuals lacking direct personal dependence. With this specificity erased, every general social relationship appears doubly inverted: the subjects of classical political economy are free persons who, as such, allocate their capacity for social labor on their own account and at their own risk, but who at the same time only perform immediately social labor despite lacking any direct personal connection with one another. This contradiction in terms is laid bare in the presentation of value—therefore, the product of private labor—as if it were naturally expressed in labor time and, thus, as if there were an authority with the power to organize all social labor. Consequently, the necessary form of value and, from there, the determination of money as a reified expression, is reduced to a question of greater 'naturalness' and 'ease':

> Consequently, it seems more natural to estimate its value in exchange for the quantity of any other kind of commodity, rather than for the amount of labor that can be acquired with it. Most people understand better what a certain quantity of a particular commodity means than an amount of labor. The former is a tangible object, and the latter, an abstract notion, which, although quite intelligible, is not as natural and obvious... Therefore, for him [the butcher], it is more natural and simpler to estimate the value of meat in terms of money, which is the commodity that serves as the main intermediary...[1]

Through this hodgepodge of mutually incompatible determinations, classical political economy erases the historical development of the organization of social labor. And just as psychoanalytic theory turns to the myth of the 'murder of the primal father' to naturalize the features inherent in consciousness alienated in the commodity, classical political economy

[1] Adam Smith, Research on the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations, Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1958, pp. 432-433

resorts to the myth of the 'primitive and crude state of society that precedes the accumulation of capital' to naturalize the commodity as the product of all human labor:

> If in a nation of hunters, for example, it usually takes twice as much work to kill a beaver as a deer, the beaver will naturally trade for or be worth two deer. It is natural that something that is generally the result of two days' work or two hours should be worth double that which is the product of one day or one hour.[2]

Naturalization that is completed with the statement that 'in the early stages of society,' exchange values were produced using tools that constituted 'capital' owned by the producers themselves:

> Even in that initial stage referred to by Adam Smith, a certain amount of capital, possibly acquired or accumulated by the hunter himself, would be necessary to allow him to kill his prey.[3]

In summary, for classical political economy, it is in the nature of use-values produced by labor to be exchangeable objects, to possess exchange value. Thus, this attribute has nothing to do with any historically specific social relation in the allocation of the total labor force of society under the various concrete useful forms of labor to be performed by each individual. What, then, is the meaning of this naturalization? As soon as the commodity is conceived as the natural form of the product of human labor, the historically specific consciousness of the commodity producer becomes the natural form of human consciousness. And the first thing that stands out in the consciousness of the commodity producer is their condition of free consciousness. Classical economics stops at this first appearance: the human being seems, by nature, to be a subject endowed with consciousness and will fully free from any external domination over their individual subjective freedom. Any historical form of social antagonism, but specifically the one proper to the capitalist mode of production, is thus represented as a confrontation naturally established on an equal footing, between one free individual subjectivity and another:

> It is not the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that provides us with our food, but rather their regard for their own self-interest. We do not appeal to their humanitarian feelings but to their self-interest; we speak not of our needs but of their advantages.[4]

And, just as the general unity of social production and consumption arises from the apparently independent action of private and independent producers as free subjects, classical

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[2] Ibid, p. 47

[3] David Ricardo, Principles of Political Economy and Taxation, Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1959, pp. 417-418

[4] Smith, Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations. op. cit., p. 17.

economics comes up with the idea that, however antagonistic the free subjectivities may be among themselves, their confrontation can only result in the natural harmonious unity of social life:

> None of them generally intends to promote the public interest, nor do they know to what extent they promote it... they only consider their own security, [...] they only think about their own gain; but in this, as in many other cases, they are led by an invisible hand to promote an end that was not part of their intentions. Yet it does not harm society in any way that such an end is not part of their purposes, since in pursuing their own interest, they promote that of society in a way more effective than if it were part of their design.[5]

Except, of course, when these free subjectivities violate their natural determination and ally with others, or rely on a power that is conceived as externally given (the state)[6], unnaturally sacrificing, in both cases, their full individual freedom.

9.2 Neoclassical Economy

If anyone imagines that it is impossible to push ignorance regarding human history further than classical political economy did—in its effort to naturalize the exchangeability of commodities—they do not know what neoclassical economics is capable of. Neoclassical economic theory recoils in horror from the point reached by classical analysis, halting its own inquiry at the most immediate appearance: the utility of commodities. Yet utility is not merely an attribute of the products of labor—regardless of the manner in which that labor is socially organized. It is an attribute of any use-value for human life, even if its production entails absolutely no social labor. From this very juncture, an attempt is made to obscure the fact that what is at stake in the determination of certain use-values as commodities is the material allocation of social labor in its various concrete forms. But this is merely the first step.

The following consists of setting as the second determinant of value the negation of the result of human productive activity, of labor—that is, scarcity. To complete the emptying of content, it transforms labor, from activity, into a thing. Or rather, into the negation of a thing. According to neoclassical economics, human life has a natural state, 'leisure,' the absence of all productive activity. If religious consciousness conceives of human life as possible after death, neoclassical economics conceives of human life as possible without human life—that is, without the consumption of use-values produced by labor. In reality, it not only conceives of human life as possible abstracted from its specific productive activity—labor—but even from all merely animal productive activity.

Here there is no longer even naturalization, simply a crude falsification. So crude that it continues to conceive of "leisure", not as the negation of productive activity, but as a thing, as the «good» that human beings possess in their natural state. At last, work appears. But not as activity, not as the expenditure of the body that human beings need to carry out as the first step

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[5] Ibid, p. 402

[6] Ibid, p. 65-66

of their metabolic process. On the contrary, for neoclassical theory, work is the renunciation of the consumption of the supposed natural good, the sacrifice of "leisure":

> People only work when they value the fruit of labor above the decrease in satisfaction caused by the shortening of leisure. ... we must see leisure as any other economic good [...]. Action is always, in essence, the change from one situation to another situation [...]. An example, the isolated hunter who kills an animal for his own consumption; he changes leisure and a cartridge for food.[7]

Based on this objectification of human productive activity, the social organization of this activity—that is, the allocation of social labor to the performance of the various concrete useful tasks by each individual—is presented as if it were the opposite of the organization of human action. It is presented as if it were an allocation of things; that allocation of "resources" in which the object of the organization, that is, human labor, appears alongside the allocation of the means of production that are its instruments.

Neoclassical economics takes yet another step in erasing labor as the activity that properly determines the human consumption process. It does so by conceiving the production of means of production as a 'refraining' from consumption, as a 'waiting' to consume: '... spinning is the product of the labor of many kinds and of waiting.'[8]

First of all, the means of production are the immediate object of social consumption. However, this is not about individual consumption but productive consumption, from which use-values result, whose material form makes them suitable for individual human consumption. Even if the owners of the means of production strictly believed in neoclassical theory and decided to stop "waiting" to consume, indulging themselves with them, they would find that they have highly indigestible material forms; for example, lumps of iron or cyanide. In such a case, it would be a matter of pure humanity to free them from such a risk by eliminating private property over them.

Secondly, animal life consists of individually consuming those useful objects that are found in their environment. As long as humans individually consume the use-values they find in their environment, for example, when they breathe normally on the earth's surface, their life process does not differ from that of any animal species. But, no matter how essential these consumptions are to them, human life is distinguished as a different kind compared to the life of animal species because it is sustained by the multiplicity of individual consumption of use-values produced through labor.

The medicated asthmatic, or the individual in an air-conditioned environment, does not breathe like animals; their breathing is the result of human labor. And human labor is sustained by the productive consumption of the means of production that that same human labor has previously produced. In its natural life process, cattle individually consume the grass seeds they find in the field. In its natural life process, human beings do not consume "grass"; they plant a

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[7] Ludwig von Mises, Human Action, Irvington: Foundation for Economic Education, 1996, pp. 132 and 194, own translation.

[8] Alfred Marshall, Principles of Economics, Madrid: Aguilar, 1948, p. 486. Perhaps the production of aged whiskey weighed on Marshall's conscience enough to make him see a similar process everywhere.

seed, harvest the fruit, grind it, knead it, bake it, and individually consume bread. Therefore, the process of individually consuming bread inherently involves the production process of ovens, mixers, mills, harvesters, and seeders, which, in turn, themselves, without looking further, involve the production process of iron, bricks, etc.

When human society expends its labor power in producing means of production, it is not expecting to consume. It is taking the first necessary step in the realization of the properly human process of metabolism. When a human being produces plows, they are not waiting to consume. They are taking the first step in their process of consuming bread and, therefore, in defining themselves as a being generically distinct from animal species.

On the other hand, neoclassical economics aims to make merchandise producers believe that human life is possible without the production of means of production: assuming a widespread attack of anxiety to 'consume now,' human life would continue its course with no other novelty than the disappearance of the production of means of production. Could it be that neoclassical theorists secretly feel an attraction to live idly and eat grass? Of course, if the ordinary merchandise producer believes that value is a natural attribute of goods, to the neoclassical academic scholars who award the Nobel Prize in Economics, it must seem that, to acquire a scientific understanding of the historical development of the economic forms of society, it is enough to watch 'The Flintstones' on television: according to Nobel laureate Paul Samuelson,

> Primitive economies [the primitive community] [...] tend to be states with high interest rates, in which short-term production methods are used due to the extreme 'scarcity of time'.[9]

Yes, and without a doubt, the interest is paid in 'stonedollars'.

Thanks to its naturalization of the commodity, the neoclassical economy abstracts the free consciousness of the commodity producer and represents it as the natural form of human consciousness. But it is no longer even a free consciousness that relates to others like itself. Its relationship is with useful and scarce things within itself, in the process of achieving its full satisfaction:

> As all economists after Jevons know very well, the optimal conditions of exchange depend solely on intrapersonal comparisons of utility, but never on interpersonal ones.[10]

From this maximization of utility through individual free choice, nothing can emerge but social harmony defined as the 'welfare optimum,' in which no one can improve their level of free satisfaction without reducing that of another:

> We will say that the members of a community enjoy, in a certain position, the maximum of ophelimity, when [...] any small displacement from this position necessarily has the

[9] Paul Samuelson, 'Understanding the Mandan Notion of Exploitation: A Summary of the So-Called Transformation Problem Between Marxian Values and Competitive Prices,' in Journal of Economic Literature, vol. IX, no. 2 (1971), p. 401

[10] Mark Blaug, Economic Theory in Retrospect, Barcelona: Editorial Luis Miracle, 1968, p. 784.

> effect of increasing the ophelimity enjoyed by certain individuals, and decreasing that enjoyed by others; being pleasant to some and unpleasant to others.[11]

Classical political economy naturalized social antagonism by presenting it as an expression of the free exercise of natural subjectivity, even though only natural social harmony could arise from it. In neoclassical economics, social antagonism is represented as a directly unnatural phenomenon. Every historical form of social antagonism, and specifically that of the capitalist mode of production, is understood as the unnatural attempt of one subjectivity to interfere with the free exercise of another in its relationship to things. Once again, neoclassical economics is concerned with erasing what is evident even to common consciousness.

Classical political economy is an expression of the scientific advancement of free consciousness as a concrete form of alienated consciousness on its path to discovering, beyond the appearance of being an abstractly free consciousness, its own alienation. But it is so only up to the point of discovering human labor as the substance that determines the exchangeability of commodities. Once this discovery is made, two paths open up before it. The first involves continuing to advance scientifically, confronting the subordination of the consciousness and will of the commodity producer to the social attributes of the material product of their own conscious and voluntary action. For this, it is necessary to face the value form in which this alienation is objectified, recognizing in it the general social relationship between private and independent producers, thereby taking the first step in discovering the historical character of the capitalist mode of production. In contrast, classical political economy follows the other possible path, which precisely defines it as such a political economy. Instead of discovering the historical specificity of commodity-producing labor, it turns this specificity into a natural determination of human labor. Instead of overcoming the fetishism of the commodity, it reproduces it as a product of scientific consciousness itself. Its very scientific method, logical representation, enables it to do so: it only needs to interrupt the analysis and introduce concepts such as, for example, the 'primitive and rough state of society,' or money as a practical way to resolve the 'difficulties' of calculating exchange value in terms of labor time. Emptied of their concrete determinations in this way, labor, money, etc., are reduced to mere abstractions. In summary, classical political economy is the way a concrete social necessity is realized: the necessity to advance scientifically in the discovery of free consciousness as a concrete form of alienated consciousness, while simultaneously reproducing this appearance as a product of objective knowledge.

Neoclassical economics is also a theoretical representation. But here, the use of a logical constructive structure does not have the dual purpose still present in classical theory. It is no longer a matter of advancing in the discovery of the concrete determinations of the organization of social labor in the capitalist mode of production, insofar as this advance does not go beyond the appearance of being the product of a consciousness that progresses in the development of its abstract freedom. What is at stake is to move back toward the most immediate appearances of the determinations of the commodity as a general social relationship. Here, it is about manipulating determinations whose content is directly accessible to common knowledge,

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[11] Vilfredo Pareto, Manual of Political Economy, Buenos Aires: Editorial Atalaya, 19()6, pp. 267-268.

simply presenting them in reverse as if the result of this manipulation were the true immediate appearance. The aim of this regression and manipulation is to construct a representation that erases the organization of human productive activity as the content of economic determinations, to conceive it instead as relations between things. The goal of neoclassical economics is to produce a fully alienated consciousness under the appearance of being the product of knowledge that has followed the path of consciousness advancing in the development of its freedom by knowing its determinations objectively, that is to say, scientifically.

Therefore, neoclassical economics is the most alienated expression of consciousness as an attribute of the commodity, since, just as it sustains the appearance of being a fully free consciousness insofar as it is the product of formally scientific knowledge, at the same time it intentionally produces itself as a consciousness that embraces the fetishism of the commodity beyond what ordinary consciousness itself does:

> Once exchange value has been determined, it has the character of a natural phenomenon, natural in its origin, natural in its manifestation, and natural in its essence. If wheat and silver have value, it is because they are scarce, that is, useful and limited in quantity, two natural circumstances.[12]

Its mathematical complexity is nothing more than a mask of apparent complexity and scientific objectivity behind which it seeks to hide its purely ideological content as the most developed expression of the consciousness that cultivates its own alienation. Its inherent contradiction between being an apparently free consciousness by relying on a formally objective method and using this method to deepen its own alienation bursts forth in the juggling it must resort to in order to maintain the appearance of its logical coherence.

9.3 Neo-Ricardian political economy

Classical political economy and neoclassical economics are the scientific forms through which the fetishistic consciousness of the commodity producer confronts the simplest concrete form presented by their general social relation, the commodity. For the former, it is a natural attribute of use-values produced by human labor to have exchange value, to be tradable objects. For the latter, it is a natural attribute of useful and scarce objects to have exchange value. In contrast, the critique of political economy transcends these appearances by advancing through thought the reproduction of the necessity that determines commodities as the material product that, at the same time, is the immediate bearer of the organization of social production and consumption when social labor is carried out in a private and independent manner. And only by following this path does it reveal the fetishistic character of economic theory. What, then, is the character of the 'critical political economy'?

To begin with, there is the critical neoricardian political economy. Its most stripped-down version regarding the specificity of commodity-producing labor is offered by Robinson:

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[12] Léon Walras, Elements of Pure Political Economy, Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1987, p. 160.

> Any intrinsic meaning that the concept of value may have had for a disciple of Hegel is, for the modern English reader, merely a matter of definition. The value of a commodity consists of the labor time required to produce it.[13]

Robinson believes that the real materiality of abstract labor, and the real allocation of this materiality under its various concrete forms—useful when social labor is carried out privately and independently—have nothing more than the immaterial and fantastic existence of a 'concept.' With this, he considers himself freed from them, to revert to the appearance where Ricardo had stopped: if value is nothing more than labor time without further ado, it is in the nature of all products of labor to be exchangeable objects.

9.3.1 Sraffa

Sraffa constructs the most sophisticated neo-Ricardian version. He takes, as a starting point, a given technical matrix that represents the unit of social production and consumption through its material elements. That is, it is an input-output matrix formed by the totality of the means of production and means of livelihood that constitute the unit of a cycle of the social metabolism process:

> ... Let us consider an extremely simple society that produces just enough to sustain itself. Goods are produced by various industries and are exchanged in a market held after the harvest. [...] There is a single set of exchange values which, if adopted by the market, restores the original distribution of products and makes it possible for the process to be repeated; such values arise directly from the methods of production.[14]

From this starting point comes the title of the work, production of commodities by means of commodities. The very statement of self-reproduction as a starting point makes a tautological consequence that these 'exchange values' are the ones adopted by the market. In case there were any doubts, Sraffa adds that:

> ... This formulation assumes that the system is in a state of self-replacement [...] Systems that are unable to behave this way at any proportions and result in a deficit in the production of some goods relative to their consumption, even if none have a surplus, do not represent viable economic systems and are not considered.[15]

Then, Sraffa carries out what he calls the "reduction to dated labor quantities"[16]: he takes each element of the matrix and breaks it down into the amount of labor directly required to

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[13] Joan Robinson, Introduction to Marxist Economics. Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1970, p. 34.
[14] Piero Sraffa, Production of Commodities by Means of Commodities, Barcelona: Oikos-Tau, 1965, pp. 17-18.
[15] Ibid, p. 19n.
[16] Ibid, p. 57-58

produce it, leaving as a residue the means of production that were used in its production. This residue, in turn, is broken down in the same way; and so on, until every material element of the technical matrix is replaced by the corresponding amount of labor. From this, it follows that the proportionate relationships initially established between the different material elements are represented as proportionate relationships between amounts of labor. He thus concludes that:

> The terms of work can be considered as the constituent elements of the price of a merchandise.[17]

Thus, for Sraffa, the material unit of social production and consumption determines the value of commodities. But how, then, is this material unit determined? When social labor is carried out privately and independently, the material unit of social production and consumption is not determined a priori. It only results a posteriori from the private and independent allocation of each portion of society's total labor force to the performance of the different concrete tasks whose products—if socially useful in relation to other private and independent individuals—manifest as social use-values when the abstract labor embodied in them is represented as the capacity of these use-values to relate to each other in exchange. In a commodity-producing society, the unit of social production and consumption, through which society's life is reproduced, is not directly determined. It is realized in this indirect manner. For the unit to be established a priori, labor would need to be organized in a directly social way. But in that case, social labor would manifest as such at the very moment it is performed, not needing to be represented, once embodied, as the value of commodities that governs the unit of social production and consumption. Sraffa confuses private labor with directly social labor. He begins by placing the latter in the position of the former, only to later present the former as the natural form of social labor.

Sraffa's commodities are not the product of social labor organized in a private manner but of directly social labor, labor organized directly by society with the declared objective, at the starting point, of 'producing just enough to sustain itself.' The labor that produces Sraffa's commodities is no more private than that; in his society of supposed commodity producers, it is impossible for any expenditure of labor to result in an object that is scarce in social use-value and, therefore, in value. Thus, his model consecrates the apologetic law of Say, concerning the impossibility of a divorce between production and consumption in the capitalist mode of production: every supply creates its own demand. If anything, Sraffa's commodities might be given the benefit of the doubt in the title of the book, but they certainly are not in the first sentence of the text. Once again, the products of human labor are conceived as exchangeable by nature. Once again, free consciousness is naturalized, abstracting it from its historically specific determination as the concrete necessary form of consciousness alienated in the commodity.

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[17] Ibid, p. 61

Chapter 10

Marxist Political Economy

The neo-Ricardian political economy is far from being the main branch within critical political economy. This position belongs to Marxist political economy. That is, to a political economy that declares itself the heir of the critique of political economy but recognizes that it differs from it enough to belong to a different genre: it has returned to the proper realm of political economy. Its critical nature does not question the very unity of political economy as a science, but rather the apologetic character of the capitalist mode of production that dominates within it, namely neoclassical economics. It might seem, then, that the critical stance toward capitalism taken by Marxist political economy protects it from any naturalization of the determinations of value.

However, within Marxist political economy, there is a prevailing tendency to obscure the evidence that the private and independent form in which social labor is carried out within the capitalist mode of production is the specific historical attribute of this system, which determines the representation of its materiality—as a general expenditure of human labor—as value, the exchangeability of its material product, the commodity. This concealment follows two main courses: one that perceives as natural what is actually specific to the particular social form of human labor in the capitalist mode of production, and another that perceives as a specific social form of the capitalist mode of production what is in fact inherent to the materiality of human labor.

Before focusing on the diversity of expressions of these conceptions and their respective singularities, it is worth recalling here a couple of critical observations that Marx wrote for himself specifically regarding the way he approached the question of value and its form.

Ten years before publishing Capital, Marx defines the form of the synthesis process that culminates the development of the 'correct scientific method' as the course in which the unfolding of 'abstract determinations leads to the reproduction of the concrete through the path of thought.'[1] At that same moment, he criticizes himself regarding the form he is giving to the exposition of that synthesis by unfolding the simplest specific determinations of the general specific social relation of the capitalist mode of production, that is, of the commodity, its value, and its form:

> The product becomes a commodity; the commodity becomes exchange value; the exchange value of the commodity is its immanent quality of money; this quality of money separates from it as money [...]. At another moment, before leaving this problem,

[1] Karl Marx, Fundamental Elements for the Critique of Political Economy (draft) 1857-1858, Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 1971, vol. 1, p. 21.

> it will be necessary to correct the idealistic way of presenting it, which gives the impression of dealing with pure conceptual definitions and the dialectic of concepts. Therefore, the statement must be criticized above all: the product (or activity) becomes a commodity; the commodity, exchange value; the exchange value, money.[2]

It should therefore be noted that, unless one believes that Marx was inconsistent regarding his own method, the path of thought that reproduces the concrete in Capital does not start from 'pure conceptual definitions' nor does its course follow the 'dialectic of concepts'.

Thirteen years after the publication of Capital, Marx explicitly refers to the incompatibility of such reproduction with conceptual representations, precisely in connection with the ideas that Wagner attributes to him:

> "This theory [Marx's] is not so much a general theory of value as a theory of cost, inspired by Ricardo" [loe. cit.]. The same applies to Capital as to Sieber's work [...] Mr. Wagner could have realized the difference between my theory and Ricardo's, who in reality only deals with labor as a measure of the magnitude of values, and therefore does not find the link between his theory of value and the nature of money.
> ... At first glance, I do not start from 'concepts', and therefore, not from the 'concept of value' either, which is why I have no reason to 'divide' this 'concept' in any way. What I start from is the simplest social form in which the product of labor takes shape in present-day society, which is the 'commodity'. I analyze this, and I do so focusing primarily on the form in which it appears and discover that [...] the concrete social form of the product of labor, the 'commodity', is on the one hand a use-value and on the other a 'value'... On the other hand, the *vir obscurus* has not realized that even when doing the analysis of commodities I do not linger on the dual mode in which it presents itself, but immediately proceed to show that in this dual mode of the commodity the dual character of labor of which it is the product is manifested: useful labor, that is, the concrete acts of various labors that create use-values, and abstract labor, labor as expenditure of labor power, regardless of the 'useful' way in which it is expended... [I]n the analysis of the commodity [...] there is no need to immediately connect definitions of 'capital', which are necessarily contradictory as long as we stick to analyzing the elements of the commodity.
> ... This explains why our *vir obscurus*, who hasn't even realized that my analytical method [...] has not the slightest connection with that method of intertwining concepts favored by German professors ('with words one disputes at will, with words one builds a system') ...
> Who is the one establishing here a logical contrast? Mr. Rodbertus, for whom 'use value' and 'exchange value' are, by nature, mere 'concepts'... Here there is only a 'logical' contrast for Rodbertus and the doctoral German schoolmasters who follow him, who start from the 'concept' of value, and not from the 'social thing,' the 'commodity,' and then the concept splits (unfolds) by itself as if it had two faces, only to end up debating

[2] Ibid, pp. 72 and 77

which of the two chimeras they were actually looking for![3]

It is not at all surprising that, for an economist like Wagner, convinced that value is a natural attribute of every useful and scarce thing, a form of knowledge that, instead of starting from concepts, begins with the simplest form of the concrete object at hand, and that, instead of building a conceptual system, reproduces in thought the development of that simplest form in its necessary concrete forms, is incomprehensible. But let us see what prominent Marxist theorists, who present themselves, and are recognized, as the most faithful followers of Marx's developments on the commodity and its value, have to say about this.

10.1 Marxist political economy, which conceives as natural what is actually specific to the social form of human labor in the capitalist mode of production, or the reduction of the form of value to its substance

This line erases the specificity of the private character of commodity-producing labor by appealing, first of all, to the same ways of naturalizing it used by neo-Ricardian economics. The most straightforward procedure is to claim that value is simply another name given to social labor, that they are synonymous, and that, therefore, value is as eternal as human labor.

10.1.1 Cockshott and Cottrell

According to Cockshott and Cottrell:

> In general, the concept of value, or socially necessary labor time, also applies to non-market economies... value exists in any society with a social division of labor, which must include socialism.[4]

The authors of this type seem to believe that the term 'value' was coined in political economy simply as a matter of expediency, and that it holds no further determination than being a shortened way of saying 'social labor.' Value is the attribute of exchangeability that commodities possess, that is, the ability they have to unnaturally exchange their materiality reciprocally, in which the social labor materialized in them is represented to establish the unity of social production and consumption, due to such labor having been organized privately and independently. But, for Cockshott and Cottrell, the specific determination of commodities is not this aptitude, their value, but the necessary expression of it, the exchange value:

> Exchange value is the specific form taken by value in market economies.[5]

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[3] Karl Marx, Marginal Notes on Adolph Wagner's 'Treatise on Political Economy,' Mexico City: Cuadernos de Pasado y Presente, 1982, vol. 97, pp. 35, 48-51, and 55-56.
[4] Paul Cockshott and Allin Cottrell, 'Markets, Value and Socialism,' in Science & Society, vol. 61, no. 3 (1997), p. 335, own translation.
[5] Ibid., p. 335, own translation.

Then, it does not matter how social labor is organized, all of its products are exchangeable objects. So much so that the overcoming of the capitalist mode of production by socialism can only reproduce this natural aptitude—value—its natural expression—price—and its natural place of expression, the market. Only, the price will have been freed from its determination as exchange value, to express itself directly as amounts of labor:

> All consumer goods are marked with their labor-values, [...] Beyond this, the actual prices (in hours of work) [...] will be set at the levels that balance the market.[6]

Behind the latest '21st Century Socialism,' the theory about replacing money with time-based vouchers from the very old 19th-century anarchism of Proudhon emerges.

10.1.2 Seton

Another simple form of the naturalization of value in the neo-Ricardian style consists of directly asserting that value can be expressed in quantities of labor. This is what, for example, Seton does:

> Let k_{ij} represent the " cost input " of industry j's product into industry i (reckoned in terms of labour value).[7]

10.1.3 Foley

The more elaborately appearing versions within the same line assume the existence of a material matrix of the unity of social production and consumption as a condition for the labor spent in producing each commodity to be determined as its value. Once again, private labor is conceived inverted, as if it were labor assigned to its different concrete forms in a directly social unit. The products of socially assigned labor have no need, nor manner, of taking the form of commodities; nor does the social labor that produces them need to be represented as their value. And, again, the problem that the commodity form comes to solve, that is, the problem of how to assign the total labor force of society under the concrete useful forms of labor when there is no direct social relation of general interdependence among the producers and, therefore, social labor is carried out privately and independently—has already been assumed to be solved in advance. In some cases, Marxist authors develop their own models for this purpose; for example, Morishima (based on Leontief's input-output matrix and its modeling by von Neumann)[8], Lipietz[9], and Foley. Let us focus on the latter.

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[6] Ibid., p. 347, own translation.
[7] Francis Seton, 'The Transformation Problem,' in Review of Economic Studies, vol. XXIV, no. 65 (1957), p. 150.
[8] Michio Morishima, Marx's Economics, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973, pp. 14-15.
[9] Alain Lipietz, 'The So-Called "Transformation Problem" Revisited,' in Journal of Economic Theory, no. 26 (1982), p. 61.

Foley starts from a double inversion. First, he proposes that:

> This path of development of the labor theory of value begins at a global level with the total abstract social labor expended in the production of commodities ...[10]

Secondly, instead of confronting the form of value to uncover its determinations, it is proposed to state 'definitions' on the following basis:

> The following definitions [...] assume that all goods produced are sold.[11]

Under these conditions, any expenditure of human labor power is necessarily a useful portion of social labor. That is, in the model, the products of private labor do not exist as such, but rather as products of immediately social labor. Immediately social labor presupposes the existence of a consciousness vested with the authority to define, with also immediately social validity, the technical attributes of each specific labor task and the amount of it that must be put into action. But, in Foley's model, this authority also directly extends to determining the simple expenditure of human labor power applied to the production of each use value and to the total mass of each of them. Such authority has been beyond the reach of all direct modes of organizing social labor that have existed to date. Of course, in the inverted world of the statement of 'definitions' through model construction, no determination enters other than the author's will:

> We can also think about calculating the part of this labor [simple, abstract, socially necessary labor] embodied in each commodity, which I will call the labor-value of the commodity, measured in hours of work.[12]

Thus, the expression of value appears inverted, starting with the determination of price as the amount of money for which a commodity is exchanged[13] – where money has the fantastic ability to relate to the commodity in a proportion of undefined basis, to end with the 'value of money' defined tautologically as 'the rate of the labor value of the commodity in relation to its price'.[14]

10.1.4 Steedman

Other authors appeal directly to the Sraffa model (more von Neumann), as Steedman does.[15] And, once again, the entire construction starts from assuming the immediate unity

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[10] Duncan Foley, "The value of money, the value of labor power, and the Marxian transformation problem," in Review of Radical Political Economics, vol. 14, no. 2 (1982), p. 37, own translation.
[11] Ibid., p. 38, own translation.
[12] Ibid., p. 39, own translation.
[13] Ibid., p. 37, own translation.
[14] Ibid., p. 39, own translation
[15] Alan Steedman, Marx, Sraffa and the problem of transformation, Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1985, p. 11.

between social production and consumption:

> The capitalist economies under consideration are always in a state of self-reproduction, [...], so that production, exchange, and distribution are always seen as a unity.[16]

Steedman intends to conceal his inversion of private labor as if it were immediately social labor, invoking Marx:

> ... these value quantities were determined by two different things that Marx assumed as given, in a given capitalist economy, at a given moment. On the one hand, they depended on the existing production conditions, both technical and social, which defined the existing relationships between inputs and products in the production process ...[17]

The obvious fact that the material conditions of production of each commodity determine the amount of labor represented as its value in order to manifest itself as socially useful in exchange is here inverted in the assertion that there is no private labor that is not recognized as directly social at the moment it is performed. This is the same as claiming that the labor that produces commodities is not social labor carried out in a private and independent manner, but its opposite, immediately social labor. Again, the necessity that the value form of the product of social labor comes to satisfy—namely, the allocation of the total labor power of society to the various individual useful tasks in the absence of personal dependency relations governing such allocation—is presupposed as already satisfied as a starting point for the determination of value itself. Amid his displays of professorial pedantry, Steedman boasts about his inversion:

> The physical data concerning production conditions and real wages can explain everything that is explainable in terms of value magnitudes, which are simply derived, and can indeed explain much more.[18]

With all harshness, Steedman places the path that leads to the result in the place of the result itself, while at the same time presupposing the result as the determinant of the path. That is, he conceives value, that is, the way in which the unity of social production and consumption is established because labor is carried out privately and independently, as the result that arises from the preexistence of that unity. It is worth recalling what Marx himself notes regarding inversions similar to Steedman's:

> ... nothing is more false and absurd than presuming, on the basis of exchange value, of money, the control of associated individuals over their overall production, as occurred

[16] Ibid, p. 17.
[17] Ibid, p. 37.
[18] Ibid, p. 166.

in the case already discussed above with the time-bond bank.[19]

Steedman's constructions have no more substance than Sraffa's model: human labor naturally produces commodities, use values that have the social attribute of being exchangeable, and, therefore, commodities are the naturally eternal form of the social product. There is no more consciousness in human history than that of the commodity producer, that is, a consciousness that appears as being abstractly free, when it is the concrete form of alienated consciousness.

10.1.5 Sweezy

In contrast, Sweezy starts from recognizing that the specificity of social labor producing commodities lies in the private and independent character with which it is carried out, and that its representation as the value of commodities is the way in which the unity of social production and consumption is established.[20] But it cannot escape the same naturalization. He begins by removing the question of the form of value from the discussion, reducing it to an abstract 'theory of money':

> The price, according to the way Marx uses the term in Volume I of Capital, is merely the monetary expression of value. As such, its analysis belongs to the theory of money, which we will not attempt to present in this work.[21]

Then, consider over and over again that value is expressed directly in quantities of its substance:

> Up to this point, in our value schemas we have calculated everything in terms of hours of work; in other words, one hour of work has been the unit of calculation.... If we had used the unit of working time as the unit of calculation in the schemas of value and price, the totals would have been the same.[22]

Based on this displacement of form by substance in the expression of value, it is not surprising that Sweezy ends up stating, in relation to Marx's development regarding the concrete form that value takes insofar as commodities are not simply products of labor but of alienated labor as an attribute of capital, that:

> ... Having observed that Marx's method was flawed, we identified the source of his error and proceeded to demonstrate that the problem can be resolved in a logically satisfactory manner.... Our research has shown, however, that Marx's method is

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[19] Marx, Fundamental Elements for the Critique of Political Economy (draft) 1857-1858, op. cit., p. 86.
[20] Paul Sweezy, Theory of Capitalist Development, Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1969, pp. 52 and 64-66.
[21] Ibid, p. 66
[22] Ibid, p. 130-131 and 136.

unsatisfactory.[23]

An assertion for which Sweezy has no more basis than the inversion of the material unity between social production and consumption as a premise for the determination of these forms (the production prices)[24], when it is they who carry the establishment of said material unity. That is, he ends up endorsing, in its two forms, the identification of socially performed labor in a private and independent manner with its opposite, labor organized in a directly social way.

10.1.6 Mandel

With much broader strokes, Mandel also recognizes, in the determination of value, the allocation of society's total labor power under the various concrete and useful forms of labor[25]. But he does so by replacing the private and independent form in which social labor that produces commodities is carried out with a "society that rests on the economy of labor time":

> Those who primarily produce use values, intended to satisfy their own needs or those of their community, subsist on the products of their own labor. Both in practice and in their consciousness, they identify production with product, labor with the products of labor. In commodity production, this unity is broken.
> ... When a more consistent division of labor is established, the community contribution of each producer must be measured by a common criterion.... This common measure can be none other than the economy of working time.[26]

According to Mandel, the historical necessity for the emergence of this economy can be explained as follows:

> Normally, no community would willingly sacrifice a significant portion of its leisure time to work and produce more, except when compelled by economic and social necessity. In other words, the increase in surplus production beyond a narrow limit (food reserves) is not the result of autonomous economic development. It is the result of external pressures, whether economic (exchange rates) or social (appropriation of the surplus by a central power or ruling class).[27]

Mandel progresses from one absurdity to another. The development of the productive forces of social labor becomes the "economy of labor time." Relations of production become "external pressures." Economic determinations are no longer social determinations, but rather stand in opposition to them. As in the vulgarities of neoclassical economics, the abstract

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[23] Ibid, p. 139-140.
[24] Ibid, pp. 125-136.
[25] Ernest Mandel, Treatise on Marxist Economics, Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1971, vol. 1, p. 61
[26] Mandel, Treatise on Marxist Economics, op. cit., pp. 54 and 56-57.
[27] Ibid, p. 56

negation of labor, "leisure," becomes the natural condition of human life.

Thanks to these inversions, Mandel has already succeeded in generating the naturalization of an abstract free consciousness, expressed in the neoclassical manner as the choice of leisure over work, but in a "critical" version by presenting it as forced to work by "external pressures." Among these pressures, "change" stands out. However critical it may claim to be, this conception merely reiterates the way in which the consciousness of the commodity producer sees itself as springing from an original, natural freedom, its exercise constrained by a social interdependence imposed externally as an attribute inherent in things, independent of any social relationship. Mandel's text is a clear expression of how the capitalist mode of production carries within it the need to reproduce fetishistic consciousness, giving it the appearance of having critically transcended itself.

By stripping the determinations of the commodity producer's consciousness of their specificity, Mandel needs to do the same with the historically specific manifestation of socially performed labor carried out privately and independently, namely, with the form of value that its product possesses. Mandel begins to do this by stating that value is expressed in quantities of its substance:

> The more the production of commodities expands, the more imperative the accurate accounting of working hours becomes.[28]

Mandel must never have seen a public or private accounting record to believe that the unit of account used in them is labor time! Furthermore, he cannot see the reason for the existence of money as the necessary form for the manifestation of social labor performed privately and independently, but rather as a mere intermediary to facilitate exchange:

> In order for these exchanges to take place without interruption, it is necessary that the owners of the goods be able to dispose of their goods before accidentally finding buyers who possess products that they wish to obtain in exchange for those goods.... The need for this equivalent is evident.[29]

Finally, it completes the erasure of the need for the value form by reversing the self-determination of the equivalent in the exchange relation:

> Money, the general equivalent, is first and foremost the commodity in whose value all others express their own exchange value.[30]

That is, Mandel does not read the relation 10 Ñ = 1 Z as "ten plates of gnocchi are worth a pair of shoes," but as "ten plates of gnocchi are worth the value of a pair of shoes." Again, value appears expressed in quantities of its substance. Again, private labor and its opposite,

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[28] Ibid, p. 62.
[29] Ibid, p. 66.
[30] Ibid, p. 222.

directly social labor, are presented as one and the same behind the discourse that proclaims their distinction.

10.1.7 The substitution of the real determination of value by "the concept of value"

The most barefaced way that Marxist political economy takes to identify private labor with directly social labor is to attribute naturalization to Marx himself. For example, Dobb, who praises Sraffa for his treatment of the determinations of value and their forms[31], states:

> Marx [...] in Capital [...] did not set out to formulate a new and little-known doctrine, but to adopt a principle that was part of the tradition of classical Political Economy and without which he considered any definite assertion impossible. It is evident that under these circumstances he had no intention of beginning his analysis of capitalist production other than with a definition and contrast of certain basic concepts such as value, exchange value, and use value.[32]

Dobb goes here, from naturalization, to crude falsification. Let us remember what Marx wrote about this, regarding Wagner:

> "This theory [Marx's] is not so much a general theory of value as a theory of cost, inspired by Ricardo" [loc. cit.]. The same applies to Capital as to Sieber's work [...] Mr. Wagner could have "realized" the difference between my theory and Ricardo's, who actually only deals with labor as a measure of the magnitude of values, and therefore does not find the connection between his theory of value and the nature of money. ... At first glance, I do not start from "concepts," and therefore, not from the "concept of value," which is why I have no reason to "divide" this "concept" in any way. What I start from is the simplest social form in which the product of labor takes shape in today's society, which is the "commodity."[33]

Dobb and Wagner remarkably agree regarding the scope and conceptual starting point they attribute to Marx's study of value and its form. But, while the latter writes what he writes as an open critique, the former claims to speak in Marx's name: 'he did not intend,' 'he had no intention.' Is this a kind of retrospective clairvoyance? Not exactly.

What happens is that the inversion of the critique of political economy to present it as if it were a Marxist political economy is based on the inversion of the method of the former into the generically proper method of political economy. For this, it is necessary to turn value upside down. From being the real social form in which the real materiality of socially necessary abstract labor performed privately and independently is represented, value becomes an ideal

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[31] Maurice Dobb, "Marx's Capital and Its Place in Economic Thought," in Studies on "Capital 1," Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1982, pp. 12-13.

[32] Maurice Dobb, Political Economy and Capitalism, Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1966, p. 52.

[33] Marx, Marginal Notes on Adolph Wagner's «Treatise on Political Economy», op. cit., pp. 35 and 48.

construction developed to interpret the social world in different ways. The concrete substance of the general social relation, value, is replaced by the idea of "labor-value." It is about constructing a concept, a definition, of value, with the distinctive feature of doing so based on interpreting Marx in different ways. The question is no longer to confront for oneself the simplest specific concrete of the capitalist mode of production, the commodity, to discover in it the necessary concrete form of one's own alienated consciousness and, in doing so, advance in its negation. Its place is occupied by one inverted question after another: instead of the reality of value as the substance of the general social relation, "the requirements of a theory of value"[34]; instead of the concrete determinations of the commodity, "what hypotheses about the commodity did [Marx] adopt"[35]; instead of discovering economic forms as what they are, social relations, "the requirement that all economic categories must represent social relations"[36]; instead of discovering the production of value as the law governing the realization of the unity of social production and consumption, "the law of value is essentially a theory of general equilibrium" whose "function [...] consists in explaining how it happens ..."[37]

10.1.8 The transition from the "Concept of Value" to Neoclassical Conceptions

Thanks to the emptying of real determinations to move in a world made of ideas, without more materiality than the interweaving of concepts, Marxist political economy can end up, as Sweezy does, singing praises to the neoclassical economy:

> To the extent that the way of functioning of the unequal elements of the economic system (the prices of individual goods, [...] the combination of productive factors in the individual firm, etc.) affects the problems posed for their solution, there seems to be no doubt that the calculation of value is of little use. Orthodox economists [...] have developed a kind of price theory that is more useful in this domain than anything we can find in Marx or his supporters. One might be tempted to go further and acknowledge that from a formal point of view it is possible to dispense with the calculation of value even in the analysis of the functioning of the system as a whole.[38]

So needy is Marxist political economy to immerse itself in the inversions of neoclassical economics that Sweezy, already in association with Baran, is going to insist:

> When we say that giant corporations are the architects of prices, we mean that they can and choose the prices they will charge for their products. ... What determines which prices will be charged within this range? The simplest answer is the one given by the

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[34] Dobb, Political Economy and Capitalism, op. cit., pp. 9-29.
[35] Dobb, Political Economy and Capitalism, op. cit., pp. 9-29. Rodolfo Banfi, "A pseudo problem: the labor-value theory as the basis of equilibrium prices," in Studies on "Capital 1," Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1982, p. 141
[36] Sweezy, Theory of Capitalist Development, op. cit., p. 38.
[37] Ibid, p. 65.
[38] Ibid, p. 143.

> traditional monopoly theory ...
> And this means that the general theory of prices suitable for an economy dominated by such companies is the traditional monopolistic price theory of classical and neoclassical economics. What economists have so far treated as a special case turns out, under the conditions of monopoly capitalism, to be the general case.[39]

In the real world, the execution of social labor in a private and independent manner determines the realization of the unity of the social metabolism process through the exchange of commodities. Therefore, it is the determination of the products of labor as values that shapes the market, and it is what determines the willingness with which the owners of commodities enter it. But, in the inverted world that Sweezy and Baran have the pleasure of sharing with the "orthodox economists," the monopoly, that is, the form of the market, is what determines the exchangeability of commodities, to the rhythm of the whims of the will of their owners.

This will is so freed from all material necessity that changes in labor productivity no longer play their role in the allocation of the total workforce of society to the various concrete useful jobs. According to Baran and Sweezy, the inverse relationship between productivity and unit value has vanished due to the 'simple' decision of the monopolist's will not to allow prices to fall:

> [Unstable situations] are clearly an anathema to large companies with their tendency to look ahead, to plan carefully, and to bet only on what is safe. Therefore, to avoid such situations, the sine qua non of orderly and profitable commercial operations becomes the primary goal of corporate policy. This goal is achieved by the simple means of proscribing price reductions as a legitimate weapon of economic struggle.[40]

What, then, is the source of such powerful will? As it cannot be otherwise when dealing with anathemas, the authors do nothing but sink ever deeper into a nebulous world made of 'taboos,' and where dark 'powerful forces' dominate, which Baran and Sweezy consider sufficient to invoke to have their reasoning explained:

> Naturally, this has not happened at once nor as a conscious decision. Like other powerful taboos, the opposition to price reduction has developed gradually, after long and bitter experiences, and derives its strength from the fact that it serves the interests of powerful forces within society. As long as it is accepted and followed, dangerous uncertainties are suppressed from the rationalized pursuit of maximum profits.[41]

If one is convinced that neoclassical economics explains what is considered the current key to the 'functioning of the system as a whole,' free from the 'calculation of value' and, even more, against the determinations of value, why not openly embrace this theory? Sweezy's

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[39] Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy, Monopoly Capital, essay on the economic and social order of the United States, Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1988, pp. 50 and 52

[40] Ibid, p. 51

[41] Ibid, p. 51-52

answer will not go beyond his belief in taboos as determinants of the unity of the social metabolism process:

> There is, however, a compelling reason to believe that this would be a mistaken opinion. ... If we believe with Marx and the great classical economists that profit can only be understood as a deduction from the total combined product of social labor, there is no way to overlook the calculation of value and the labor-value theory on which it is based.[42]

'Let us believe with Marx!'; critical political economy thus ends, presenting itself without any support other than being a matter of faith[43]. And from this matter of faith, value, that is, socially necessary abstract labor materialized in the commodity in a private and independent way, which is represented as the capacity of the commodity for exchange because it is the historically specific form of organizing the process of social metabolism through the exercise of free consciousness that confronts its own product as an objectified social power that is alien to it—emanates without any reality other than being a theory.

Indeed, in this fantastic world, where the place of real determinations is occupied by the

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[42] Sweezy, Theory of Capitalist Development, op. cit., p. 145.

[43] According to Samuelson, Sweezy was "the best that Exeter and Harvard could produce" (Paul Samuelson, "Memories," in Newsweek (1969), own translation). A confession of parts, a substitution for evidence. And, by the way, Samuelson is quite a prophet in this business of transforming political economy, from science, into a religious conception:

> Until the laws of thermodynamics are invalidated, I will continue relating products to inputs, that is, believing in production functions (Paul Samuelson, «Rejoinder: Agreements, disagreements, doubts, and the case of induced Harrod-neutral technical change», in Review of Economics and Statistics, vol. 48, no. 04 (1966), p. 444, own translation).

But, what would a prophet be without his disciple:

> Its validity [[that of the critique of the production function theory made by the Cambridge school, JIC]) is unquestionable, but its importance is an empirical or econometric matter that depends on the degree of substitution present in the system. Until econometricians give us the answer, relying on neoclassical economic theory is a matter of faith. I, personally, have faith; but, for the moment, the best I can do to convince others is to invoke the weight of Samuelson's authority... (Charles Ferguson, The Neoclassical Theory of Production and Distribution, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969, pp. xvii-xviii, my own translation)

In any case, the full proof that, in the field of political economy, the saying that faith alone is enough to move mountains holds true is given by Morishima:

> I believe that Marx would have developed his theory of value as a theory of aggregation [[that is, of the unit to be used to sum heterogeneous productions to group them into sectors, JIC]] if he had had the opportunity to read Keynes's General Theory.... I believe that Marx would have accepted the theory of consumer demand based on marginal utility if he had been familiar with it (Morishima, Marx's Economics, op. cit., pp. 10 and 40, my own translation).

'Marxian questions,'[44] Marxist political economy feels confident in turning the reality of value into 'Marx's concept of value,' whose 'magnitudes [...] are, at most, redundant,'[45] and even better, into a 'redundant labor-value theory.'[46] This is the obvious consequence of having begun by conceiving value as determined by the a priori unity of social production and consumption. The changeability of commodities seems to it so naturally inherent to things that it does not even occur to start by explaining it.

10.1.9 Roemer (Analytical Marxism)

For its part, analytical Marxism transforms the reality of value into:

> ...the concept of labor value, an outdated tool that does not hold up against modern standards of generality and rigor.[47]

What are these modern, general, and rigorous standards? Well:

> In the search to provide micro-foundations for the behavior that Marxists think is characteristic of capitalism, I think the tools par excellence are rational choice models: general equilibrium theory, game theory, and the arsenal of modeling techniques developed by neoclassical economics.[48]

First, for analytical Marxism, the issue is not about understanding real determinations but about constructing "foundations" for "what is thought," that is, for the initial conception of the actions of social subjects. And an a priori conception can only arise from immediate appearances, that is, from the appearance of the commodity producer as an individual who is simply free by nature. Second, the whole secret of neoclassical models boils down to inverting the concrete determinations of the consciousness and will of commodity personifications, starting from their immediate appearance as abstractly free consciousness and will, to whom their own social being appears as a set of external constraints that constrain them. In reality, consciousness, defined as free because it bears the alienation of the social powers of labor as an attribute of its product, is the concrete form in which the unity of social production and consumption is realized when the allocation of society's total labor power to different individual jobs is carried out privately and independently. However, in analytical Marxism, as in neoclassical economics, it becomes the determining factor in the entire organization of social

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[44] John Roemer, "'Rational choice' Marxism: some issues of method and substance," in Analytical Marxism, ed. by John Roemer, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1986, p. 193, own translation.
[45] Steedman, Marx, Sraffa and the problem of the transformation, op. cit., pp. 209 and 211.
[46] Geoff Hodgson, 'Marx without the labor theory of value,' in Review of Radical Poḷitical Economics, vol. 14, no. 02 (1982), pp. 59-65, p. 64.
[47] Roemer, "'Rational choice' Marxism: some issues of method and substance," op. cit., p. 199, own translation.
[48] Ibid, p. 192, own translation.

production and consumption.

What, then, distinguishes analytical Marxism from neoclassical economics according to its authors?

> Neoclassical economics suffers from a Panglossian attitude toward the consequences of uncoordinated individual behavior; [...] it is teleological regarding the consequences of market activity and individual behavior...
> The Marxist ethical view of capitalism does not come from economic models, but from history[...]a belief in the injustice of capitalism, and in overcoming it, which flows from a historical conception of the world, based on the evolution of forms of property.[49]

In short, analytical Marxism declares itself free from the "neoclassical teleology" of general equilibrium tending towards the optimum of social welfare, by affirming as a possible foundation of the individual "preferences" that govern the "rationality" of commodity owners, the concepts of "justice" and "equality" founded on the "Marxist ethical vision".[50]

As we have already seen, in the real world, justice, equality, and ethics are social relations historically inherent to commodity production. Justice and equality are merely the concrete forms in which the fact that commodities only relate to each other socially indirectly, through the exchange of equivalents, is projected, inverted, onto the personifications of commodities. It is worth quoting again here Marx's synthesis on this matter:

> Equality and freedom are not only respected in this way in exchange based on exchange values; rather, the exchange of exchange values is the real, productive basis of all equality and freedom. As pure ideas, equality and freedom are merely idealized expressions of that basis; developed into legal, political, and social relations, they are simply that basis raised to a higher power.[51]

In the general social relation materialized in the commodity, the multitude of different personal attributes of the producers appears erased by the quantitative equality between them. Thus, to the alienated consciousness that sees itself as abstractly free, this determination appears inverted: it is a natural attribute of people to be equal, and this natural attribute is realized in the justice of the exchange of commodities as equivalents. For its part, ethics, whatever guise it may be given, is the pure ideological, philosophical representation of social being, posited by nature as a determination external to the individual, as an "ought to be" that must arise from their natural, absolute independence.

Analytical Marxism has no substance other than the naturalization of the alienated consciousness of the commodity producer. And, just as it has inverted alienated consciousness as the determinant of the unity of social production and consumption in the market, from the

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[49] Roemer, «"Rational choice" Marxism: some issues of method and substance», op. cit., pp. 192 and 201, own translation.

[50] Ibid, pp. 199-201, own translation.

[51] Karl Marx, Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie (Rohentwurf) 1857-1858, Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1953, p. 156, own translation.

naturalization of the former it concludes the naturalization of the latter. The market seems so naturally eternal to it that it presents its reproduction—that is, the reproduction of the social relation that produces alienated consciousness—as the very overcoming of alienation. Socialism may change property relations, but the market must persist within it.

> To what extent can markets be used to implement a regime in which alienation and exploitation are mitigated? Oskar Lange, [...] perhaps the first economist [...] to broadly adopt the same combination of neoclassical methodology and Marxist research program that I have outlined here, was optimistic. The question is certainly open.[52]

Thus, capitalism is presented as the eternal form of social organization, with the sole limitation that:

> ...capitalism is negatively affected by unnecessary alienation and exploitation.[53]

It is no coincidence that Roemer feels close to anarchists and left-wing liberal philosophers, extolling the renewed theoretical vulgarities that dream of a world of independent private producers, and therefore, of the capitalist mode of production, without the necessary concrete forms of that mode of production[54]. Analytical Marxism likes to boast of its logical rigor, but its content is nothing more than the appearances and falsifications of neoclassical economics—that is, a theory that cannot even be logically sustained when faced with the simple question of why some goods have a price and others do not.

Analytical Marxism and Marxism grounded in the "labor theory of value"—whether by treating the two terms as synonymous, by identifying private labor with social labor, or by positing that value is expressed directly in quantities of labor—present themselves as irreconcilable opposites. Nevertheless, both share the same naturalization of free consciousness, abstracting it from its historical determination as an attribute of the private and independent realization of social labor. Consequently, their critical character is limited to the naturalization of the determinations of consciousness alienated within the commodity—determinations abstracted under the guise of being an externally imposed restriction upon the full natural freedom of individuals.

10.1.10 Lange

Moreover, the confluence between the political economy of libertarian analytical Marxism and that of Lange's Stalinist Marxism is remarkable. As is typical of neoclassical economics, Lange begins by inverting the question of the allocation of society's total labor power to the various concrete useful forms of labor, presenting it as if it were a relationship between things:

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[52] Roemer, "'Rational choice' Marxism: some issues of method and substance," op. cit., p. 200, own translation.

[53] Ibid, p. 194, own translation.

[54] Ibid, pp. 199-200, own translation.

> The technique of economic activity [...] consists of using material means for the purpose of achieving material ends.[55]

He has thus obscured the fact that what is at stake is the organization of social labor, that is, the organization of conscious and voluntary human action applied to social production and, therefore, the material determination of human consciousness and will. Consequently, he is able to conceptually manipulate consciousness and will as two abstractions. He then introduces the will as that which determines how the use of material means is organized, according to the immediate end it sets for itself. According to Lange, there are two forms of economy: the "natural" and the "profit" economy.

> Before the development of commodity production, production and distribution were geared toward the direct satisfaction of needs. This is what is called a natural economy. In this economy, the great diversity of needs is met by a variety of ends in economic activity.[56]
> Because in profit-making activity there is only one goal [... the goal of obtaining[...] an income in money] [...] and not a great diversity of goals as occurs in the natural economy, all the means and all aspects of this activity, the entirety of its technique, are subordinated to this single and common goal.[57]

Now it is the turn of consciousness to enter the scene. With no other foundation than the uniqueness of the end, followed by the reduction of the multiplicity of means to an equally unique expression, Lange makes the will appear, for the first time, as capable of the conscious pursuit of its end, as rational:

> On the other hand, the fact that in profit-making activity the end is singular and absolutely necessary, and that all means are subordinated to this single end, simplifies the activity by making it easy to analyze. ... Profit-making activity becomes an activity based on reasoning; it is transformed into a rational activity.[58]

The "principle of economic rationality" is thus inverted as the determinant of economic laws, based on the way it governs individual actions:

> ...the economic laws of human behavior express the application of the principle of economic rationality to these conditions. By understanding the conditions under which economic activity takes place, it is possible, through the principle of economic rationality, to deductively infer which laws of economic behavior operate under those conditions. Similarly, by understanding the conditions under which the economic activities of different individuals combine and intertwine, we can also deductively infer

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[55] Oskar Lange, Political Economy, Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1971, p. 135.
[56] Ibid, p. 136.
[57] Ibid, p. 141 and [140].
[58] Ibid, p. 142.

> the economic laws governing the interconnectedness of human activities.[59]

Lange starts from the same inversion as neoclassical economics. Then, he seems to depart from neoclassical economics' naturalization of the consciousness of the commodity producer and introduce historical development. But it all boils down to the pseudo-historical introduction of the "natural economy" and the "profit economy." Here, individual consciousness and will have become the "economic rationality" from which all social production arises. The conscious organization of social labor is presented as an attribute inherent only in its opposite, the general unconscious organization through commodity production. The consciousness of the commodity producer has become the natural form of consciously governed human will. This historical somersault has only served to solidify Lange's position within neoclassical economics. But it has given him the appearance of a critical stance. And, in this arena, critical stances consist of transforming the determinations of private labor into mere deviations from the true nature of the consciousness attributed to the commodity producer.

> Private ownership of the means of production only allows for the private ends of individual businesses. [...] For this very reason, within the framework of the capitalist mode of production, the principle of economic rationality is applied only within individual businesses, but finds no application in the economy of society as a whole; for this to occur, social ownership of the means of production is indispensable. This distortion of the principle of economic rationality...[60]

Thus, private property, the obvious basis of "profit-seeking activity" upon which Lange derived the "principle of rationality," now turns out not to be such a basis, but a "distortion" of this principle. At the same time, the exploitation of the worker in the capitalist mode of production has no content other than abuse:

> ...the maximization of the company's profit is achieved through the exploitation of the wage-earning working class [...] and this is frequently achieved at the expense of the health, safety and, sometimes, even the lives of the workers.[61]

It is then that the will, which has only become rational because it has no other purpose than "profit", must do another somersault and become a will that has a transcendent purpose:

> Currently [...] the possibility appears - and equally the need - to move from economic rationality limited to private enterprise, to an economic rationality applied on a social scale [...] which is called social economy planning based on the social ownership of the means of production.[62]

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[59] Ibid, p. 1 78.
[60] Lange, Political Economy, op. cit., p. 155.
[61] Ibid, p. 155.
[62] Ibid, p. 158.

Of course, in this society all the forms of social labor performed privately and independently continue to exist, having become eternal as the realization of the now naturalized "economic rationality": since this rationality springs from the unequivocal expression of ends and means, the production of value is inseparable from it. Moreover, according to Lange, the production of value reaches its full potential with the abolition of its very condition, that is, with the abolition of private labor.

> This plan defines the end in the form of a quantitatively measurable objective; as a rule, in the form of a certain national income.[63]

The commodity, and therefore the consciousness that is determined as free by virtue of being the concrete form of alienated consciousness within it, proves, once again, to be eternal. And how could it not be, if, for Lange, even the most characteristic element of the capitalist mode of production, the valorization of value, is eternal?

> The category of profit is maintained in the socialist enterprise [...] to be transformed into a means subordinated to the general social goal of the plan.[64]

10.2 Marxist political economy, which conceives as the specific social form of the capitalist mode of production what is proper to the materiality of human labour, or the reduction of the substance of value to its form

The first form of this inversion consists in beginning by recognizing the materiality of abstract labor, the productive expenditure of the human body carried out in any given concrete form, and, a couple of paragraphs later, affirming that abstract labor is a specific social form that exists only in the production of commodities.

10.2.1 USSR Academy of Sciences

According to the USSR Academy of Sciences:

> The labour of commodity producers, conceived as an investment of their human labour power in general, regardless of the concrete form it takes, is abstract labour. ... Abstract labour, which forms the value of the commodity, is a historical category, a specific form of social labour, inherent only in the commodity economy.[65]

What is the purpose of this contradiction in terms of affirming that what has been enunciated as something proper to the materiality of work only exists within a certain social form? First of all, commodity production is the way in which social labour is organised when it is carried out privately and independently. Therefore, if we were to give credit to the Academy of Sciences that abstract labor is proper only to commodity production, we should conclude that

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[63] Ibid, p. 159.
[64] Ibid, p. 159.
[65] USSR Academy of Sciences, Manual of Political Economy, Buenos Aires: Editorial Fundamentos, 1962, p. 57.

abstract labor must not exist in a society where labor is consciously organized in a directly social way, in socialism. Therefore, abstract work does not have to exist in the USSR, declared constitutionally socialist, and so defined by the Academy of Sciences in its manual. Nor, needless to say, must there be the representation of abstract labor materialized as a commodity.

But it turns out that, yes, the commodity and its developed forms are present in this "socialist" society.[66] At the beginning, the Academy of Sciences conceived of the materiality of abstract labor as a social existence. He now proceeds to conceive of the necessary concrete forms with which abstract labor is socially represented when it has been materialized privately and independently, as if they could have a content other than this:

> In the form of the old categories of value, a totally different social content is now contained and the meaning of these categories is radically changed: money, price, trade, credit, are now used as instruments for the construction of socialism.[67]

What, then, is this totally different social content of the commodity "as an instrument for the construction of socialism"? Abstract work reappears on the scene. But not because its representation as a value comes from the fact that it has been carried out privately and independently. The Academy of Sciences is following the opposite path. Since the commodity exists in "socialism," then, according to the opening statement, abstract labor exists. And where abstract labour exists, its mere presence creates value, "forms the value of the commodity". The specific social form in which it is carried out has nothing to do with it; it is in the nature of abstract work. Hence it follows that the simple expenditure of human labour-power, abstract labour, materialised in its product, is represented as value even when it has been carried out in a directly social way:

> As we have already said, in the socialist economy work is not private work, but directly social labor. ... However, in the phase of socialism, directly social labour presents specific characteristics which determine the necessity for this labour to be expressed in an indirect way, by means of value and its forms.... These ways of expressing and measuring themselves are based on the reduction of various concrete forms of labor into abstract labor, which is what creates the value of commodities.[68]

The initial nonsense has no other secret than to disguise the private character with which social labor is carried out in the USSR, passing it off as directly social labor. And the whole process is reduced to circular reasoning based on this nonsense. This content becomes starkly visible as soon as the Academy of Sciences begins to unfold the alleged "specific characteristics"

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[66] Not surprisingly, in connection with the draft manual of Political Economy, Stalin reminds its authors:

> Sometimes it is asked if the law of value exists and operates in our country, in our socialist regime. Yes, it exists and it acts. Wherever there are commodities and commodity production, the law of value cannot but exist (Joseph Stalin, The Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR, In: Selected Works, Tirana: Casa Editora "8 Nentori", 1979, p. 314).

[67] USSR Academy of Sciences, Handbook of Political Economy, op. cit., p. 430.

[68] Ibid, p. 509.

that "directly social" labor presents in this "socialism," which result in the production of commodities:

> Although social labour, under socialism, is distributed among the branches of production and enterprises in a planned manner, there is still the objective necessity of clarifying by means of the realization of commodities to what extent the production and distribution of commodity products, and in particular of articles of consumption, correspond to the needs of the members of socialist society.[69]

The "specific characteristic" of this supposed "directly social labour" is that, at the moment of putting it into action in production, it is not possible to determine, in spite of the best intentions of the plan, whether it is socially useful labour or not. It can only manifest itself as such through change. Its "specific characteristic" is none other than that it is its opposite, a private job. Hence its need to represent itself as a social attribute materialized in its product, through which the unity between social production and consumption is established. And, of course, if the purchasers of the "articles of consumption" are to carry in their pockets their connection with social production in the form of the general equivalent of these "articles," money, they themselves must first have acted as sellers of their own commodity, and more specifically, of their labor power.

It is, therefore, a society composed of individuals whose free consciousness is the concrete form in which their alienated consciousness is realized in the social powers of the material product of their labor. It is a society in which the fetishism of the commodity prevails in the organization of the process of social metabolism.[70] So much so that the highest expression of its scientific consciousness, the Academy of Sciences, needs to start from affirming that the changeability of commodities does not arise from the social form with which work is performed, but as a natural product of the materiality of abstract labor. And, on the basis of this flagrant fetishistic naturalization, the Academy of Sciences itself fulfills its ideological role in the reproduction of the alienated consciousness of the commodity producers, proclaiming it free from all fetishism:

> As we have already said, in the socialist economy work is not private work, but directly social labor. This means that in the socialist economy the fetishism of the commodity has been superseded, and that the social relations between men do not take the deceptive

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[69] Ibid, pp. 509-510.

[70] Again in Stalin's words:

> For this reason [that the products intended for consumption, necessary to cover the expenses of labor power in the process of production, are produced and made in our country as commodities subject to the action of the law of value] questions such as economic calculation and profitability are important for our enterprises today. the cost of production, prices, etc. That is why our companies cannot and should not despise the law of value. Is that good? It's not bad. In the present conditions of our country, this is not a bad thing, far from it, for this circumstance teaches the comrades who work in the domain of economics to rationally direct production and discipline them (Stalin, The Economic Problems of Socialism in the VRSS, op. cit., p. 314).

form of relations between things.[71]

However, the USSR Academy of Sciences will not be satisfied with the inversions of its textbook to cultivate the fetishism of the commodity as if it were the result of a critical scientific approach. In the 1960s, he was going to turn openly towards marginalism.[72] According to Kantorovich (Lenin Prize in 1965 and Nobel Prize in 1975), in the socialist economy, "the principle of profitability is observed" on the basis of "an index that takes the form of value."[73] These are "objectively determined evaluations" on the basis of the scarcity of the "factors of production" (labour, equipment and land), from which it follows that each of them contributes to the "value" of the product in correspondence with its respective marginal productivity.[74] Therefore, "objectively determined evaluation" includes as natural components "the lucrative evaluation" of the equipment and the "differential rent".[75] Of course, Kantorovich does not lack the assertion that this inversion of the social attributes of human labour as natural attributes of the means of production has at its basis the concept of "socially necessary labour time" elaborated by Marx.[76]

10.2.2 From the Socialist Market to Market Socialism

With the dissolution of the USSR, the fetishism of the socialist market under the democratic centralism of the dictatorship of the proletariat gave way to the revival of the fetishism of market socialism under participatory and radical democracy.[77] To say socialism is to say that the unity of the process of social metabolism is established in a direct and intentional way, by organizing itself on the basis of putting into action the total labor power of society as an immediate unit in which each individual acts as a conscious and voluntary organ of it. To say market is to say that the unity of the process of social metabolism is established indirectly and automatically, by organizing itself on the basis of putting into action the total labor power of society as a sum of atomized units in which each individual acts unconsciously as an organ of the same by performing his work privately and independently. To say socialism is to say a society of individuals who are free because they fully dominate their individual labor processes by consciously appropriating their determinations as concrete forms of social labor, so that they confront the material products of their social labor as objects subject to their will. To say market is to say a society of individuals who are free because they dominate their individual processes

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[71] USSR Academy of Sciences, Handbook of Political Economy, op. cit., p. 509.

[72] At that time, an Argentine university professor justified his courses in neoclassical economics by arguing that "economists must be taught marginalism when they are young, because otherwise what happened to Soviet economists happens to them, they learned it when they were old and were fascinated."

[73] Leonid Vitaliyevich Kantorovich, The Optimal Allocation of Economic Resources, Barcelona: Ariel, 1968, p. 19.

[74] Ibid, pp. 58-89.

[75] Ibid, pp. 89-100.

[76] Ibid, p. 71.

[77] The most widely circulated version is that of Alee Nove, La economía del socialismo factible, Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1987.

of labor by themselves as far as their absolute lack of conscious control over their determinations as concrete forms of social labor allows them, so that they face the material products of their social labor as objects that have the social power to dominate their will. To say socialism is to say individuals who are not subject to the personal domination of anyone because they have full control over their individual and social labor, so that their consciousness and will are free in form and content. To say market is to say individuals who are not subject to the personal domination of anyone because they are subject to the domination of the social powers of the product of their labor, so that their free consciousness is the way to realize their alienated consciousness in the commodity. To say socialism is to say that the exercise of the general social relationship springs directly from the consciousness and will of free individuals. To say market is to say that the consciousness and will of free individuals springs from the unconscious and involuntary exercise of their general reified social relation.

In short, socialism and the market are two ways of organizing the process of social metabolism, two forms of general social relations, irreconcilably opposed. "Market socialism" is, quite simply, a contradiction in terms. Except, perhaps, that it is a question of the society of schizophrenically associated individuals; although, neither, since schizophrenia is a form of consciousness alienated in the commodity and, as such, only inherent in the market. All of which does not prevent market socialism from counting among its cultivators the analytical Marxists, always so ready to boast about its supposed logical rigor.[78]

The secret of market socialism is limited, once again, to abstracting the free consciousness of the commodity producer from its determination as a necessary concrete form of his alienated consciousness. Once this abstraction is made, justice and equality are equally abstracted from their determination as concrete social relations bearing the alienation of consciousness in the commodity. They have become natural attributes of the so-called naturally free consciousness. It is then that "criticism" enters the scene. It does so by presenting the necessary concrete forms of commodity production in which the appearances of justice and equality lay bare their true content, as if they were mere deformations of natural equality and justice, which the abstractly free conscience could amend if it were properly intended. The degree of childish cretinism required to feed these ideological abstractions is reflected in statements such as the following from Schweicr:

> I have identified Marx's communism with what I have called the "higher form" of Economic Democracy (i.e., Economic Democracy evolved to the point where most people will have to work for reasons that exclude financial demands, and few people will feel severely constrained by their income levels).
> ... This interpretation allows us to see clearly something that Marx always claimed to be the case: communism already exists in embryonic form in capitalist societies. In this interpretation, if you do stimulating, satisfying, and secure work, and if you don't really have to worry about paying your rent or credit card bills, then you're already living as you would under communism.[79]

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[78] John Roemer, A Future for Socialism, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994.

[79] David Schweickart, Against Capitalism, New York and Paris: Cambridge University Press and Editions

Eternal life to today's communists Bill Gates and Elon Musk! Market socialism is nothing but the revamped version of the old petty-bourgeois critique of the capitalist mode of production, which demands the eternal existence of commodity production emptied of its determination as the concrete form of that mode of production. For market socialism, private labor is not a historically specific way of performing social labor, which engenders free consciousness and will as forms of realizing the alienation of them as an attribute of the commodity. On the contrary, he believes that private work is the natural way of doing social labor as an expression of the exercise of naturally free conscience and will. However critical it pretends to be, it is nothing more than an apologetic for the eternity of the capitalist mode of production. And, like its old petty-bourgeois version, market socialism lays bare its immanent contradiction in the claim to replace the expression of value, and therefore of the private character of labor, that is, money, with hourly vouchers, the assignment of which presupposes the directly social character of labor, but which, finally, giving a further twist to the contradiction, they turn out to be an expression of the private nature of the same.[80]

As the official text of the USSR Academy of Sciences, tens of thousands of individuals were forced to form their scientific consciousness, having to go through the ordeal of finding that the Manual began by stating that abstract labor is a material expenditure of human labor power and, in the next line, affirming that abstract labor only exists in the production of commodities. With the dissolution of the USSR, the Handbook has become a kind of bibliographical relic, which only serves to show what it means to transform the product of science into a crude ideological dogma. However, the mass consumption of its grotesque contradiction has been reborn at the hands of the "third way". With the weight of his academic authority, Giddens has no problem quoting verbatim the paragraph where Marx defines abstract labor as the simple expenditure of human labor power - which makes it obviously common to all forms of society - to affirm in the following sentence that:

> Abstract labor is a historical category because it is only applicable to the production of commodities.[81]

Such nonsense has fueled the process of forming the scientific conscience of the readers of the "more than one hundred thousand copies sold," as the cover of a Spanish edition of his book says.

10.2.3 Shaikh

Shaikh begins by acknowledging the historically specific fact that, at the moment of producing, private and independent producers are bearers of no more immediate social unity than they are each embodying an individual quota of society's total capacity to perform human

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de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1995, pp. 343-344.

[80] Paul Cockshott and Allin Cottrell, Towards a New Socialism, Nottingham: Spokes man, 1993, pp. 24-25 and 103-104.

[81] Anthony Giddens, Capitalism and Modern Social Theory. An Analysis of the Writings of Marx, Durkheim and Max Weber, Barcelona: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 99.

labor in general.[82] That is, they count in this social unit only for their capacity to expend their human labor power, that is, for their capacity to perform abstract labor, in any concrete form. But then Shaikh makes value, the attribute of the product resulting from the materialization of social labor organized on this basis, determinant of the attributes of this labor itself:

> Concrete work is taken into account as social labor only when it is valued ... The valorization of these [particular] works is an intrinsic part of their reproduction.[83]

According to Shaikh, value is not an attribute of the product in which labor is materialized, but it is labor as such that has the property of acquiring value, of being "valorized." With no other foundation than the introduction of this concept of the "valorization of labor," value is no longer the historically specific way in which the simple material expenditure of human labor power, common to every social form, is socially represented when it has been materialized in its product privately and independently. It has been overturned into the one that determines the very materiality of abstract labor as a historically specific property:

> Abstract labor is the property that human labor acquires when it is devoted to the production of commodities and, as such, exists only in the production of commodities.[84]

10.2.4 Benetti

Benetti conceives of abstract labor as a form specifically proper to the capitalist mode of production through a series of conversions:

> Private labor becomes a fraction of social labor by its transformation into quantities of abstract labor embodied in commodities.[85]

It is, no doubt, a succession of transformations more fantastic than the miracle of the wedding in Canaan. Private labor is the way in which free individuals apply the total labor power of society, being able to do it individually in a socially useful way, in which case private labor is the performance of social labor at the very moment of its realization, or in a socially useless way, in which case private labor will have been a waste of social labor power. Only in the world of the logical interweaving of concepts can private labour cease to be the form in which social labour is carried out in the capitalist mode of production, and become this labour itself. And only in this world can the way in which social labour, private labour, is organised, be converted into the simple material expenditure of human labour-power, into abstract labour. That private work becomes social is as unlikely as that the words uttered by an individual become his thought; and that it becomes abstract work, it is as unfeasible as that those words

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[82] Anwar Shaikh, Valor, Accumulation and Crisis. Ensayos de economía política, Bogotá: Tercer Mundo Editores, 1990, p. 71

[83] Ibid, pp. 72-73.

[84] Ibid, p. 73.

[85] Carlo Benetti, Valor y distribución, Madrid: Editorial Saltés, 1978, p. 210.

become spoons.

10.2.5 Elson

Elson considers it convenient to displace the commodity as the starting point, and to put in its place the definition of a set of "concepts" about labor:

> In analyzing the form of labor in capitalist society, Marx uses four categories of labor; the opposite pair, abstract and concrete; and the opposite pair, social and private. He does not begin the development of Capital (or The Critique of Political Economy) from these categories, but I think it is easier to evaluate his argument if we first consider what these categories mean; and what Marx claims to have established about the relationship between these aspects of labor in capitalist society, as determinants of the form of labor.[86]

An avowed supporter of using the method of "interweaving concepts," Elson has no problem conceiving of the private character of labor as naturally inherent in human labor:

> The first point I want to emphasize is that these are not concepts of different types of work.... They are concepts of different aspects of work [...]; and as such they are all one-sided abstractions. The second issue is that they are concepts that belong to every historical period.[87]

And then it is no longer simply a question of using a method that is admittedly opposed to Marx's, but of making Marx appear by endorsing the natural eternity of private work:

> They are concepts of some of those "determinations that belong to all epochs [...] Production would be unthinkable without them" (Introduction of 1857, p...).[88]

In order to naturalize private labor, including it, along with social labor, as a "concept belonging to every historical epoch," Elson projects the relation between abstract and concrete labour – which is not a relation of content and form, but of the two moments of an indissoluble material unity: concrete labour cannot be performed without spending the human body, one cannot productively expend the human body without doing so in a certain way - to the relation between social labour and private labour. But the second is not a moment in the organization of human labor that integrates, with the first, the unity of this organization. Private work is a historically specific way of performing social labor, which is the object of such organization. For the bulk of human history until today, social labor was carried out directly as such through different modes of personal dependencies, without, therefore, "private work existing at all.

From this naturalization, Elson erases the fact that the specificity of labor in the capitalist

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[86] Diane Elson, "Toe Value Theory of Labour", in Value. The Representation of Labour in Capitalism, ed. by Diane Elson, London: CSE Books, 1979, p. 144.

[87] Elson, 'Toe Value Theory of Labour', op. cit., p. 144.

[88] Ibid, pp. 144-145.

mode of production is determined by the very existence of private labor as a form of social labor. Instead, he conceives it as the coincidence between two elements of the pairs of eternal aspects:

> The "private" and the "concrete" aspects of work are in fact coincident in capitalist societies, where different kinds of work appear to be performed as a result of the choices made by the individuals who perform them.[89]

10.2.6 Murray

This author begins by making it clear in which world he is going to move. It is not, of course, a question of confronting value in its reality, but of "establishing", not a scientific knowledge, but a "doctrine" on the basis of the "correct interpretation of texts":

> In order to illustrate the importance of this way of understanding Marx's method and to establish a key Marxian doctrine that will put us on the right course when we interpret Marx's theory of abstract labor and value, I will consider how ...[90]

Murray then erases all reference to the private character of commodity-producing labor. The only time he mentions it in his text is to begin by turning upside down the representation of social labor by private labor in the commodity that occupies the place of the equivalent in the exchange relation:

> There, Marx points out three "peculiarities" of the form of value: (i) value is expressed as use-value, (ii) abstract labor is expressed as concrete labor, and (iii) private labor is expressed as directly social labor.[91]

Such an inversion reveals its true nature when one follows the underlying intention, which we shall see elaborated by Rubín, to portray commodities entering into exchange relations merely as products of private labor; this labor becomes social only when the products come into contact with money, money that possesses a Midas-like quality, not because it is itself the product of private labor representing social labor, but because it is, in and of itself, a direct expression of social labor. Yet, since the matter at hand is an "interpretation," it suffices for Murray to declare private labor irrelevant in order to dismiss it from view:

> The second is the most pertinent here.[92]

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[89] Ibid, p. 147.

[90] Patrick Murray, 'Marx's 'Truly Social' Labour Theory of Value: Part I, Abstract Labour in Marxian Value Theory', in Historical Materialism, vol. 6, n. 0 1 (2000), p. 41.

[91] Ibid, p. 59, own translation.

[92] Ibid, p. 59, own translation.

Once he has turned commodity-producing labor into an abstraction emptied of its historical specificity as privately performed social labor, Murray is in a position to move in his world made of concepts. And in this practice of interweaving concepts, it is enough for him to introduce the concept of work "abstract in practice" to enunciate the existence of a specific determination:

> Although labor can produce value only insofar as it is abstract, not all kinds of labor produce value insofar as it is abstractly conceived. Only "abstract in practice" labor produces value.... The concept of abstract labor is "analytical" because it identifies an aspect of any kind of real labor rather than identifying a type of real labor, as does the concept of "abstract in practice" labor.
> ... Abstract labor and "abstract in practice" labor are not just two different concepts, they are different kinds of concepts.[93]

He then goes on to declare that abstract labor has no real existence other than being a way of "seeing" labor:

> There is no real labor that is abstract as opposed to other real labor that is concrete. All real work is concrete and can be seen as abstract.[94]

This crude idealist inversion, according to which the way of seeing, that is, consciousness, determines by itself the real existence of abstract labor, plays a key role in Murray's construction. As it is habit, and Murray makes abundant exercise of it, it comes with the attribution to Marx included:

> But, by "abstract work in practice," a term of my own creation for which there is ample support in Marx's thoughts and words, I mean work that society treats as abstract – in the sense identified by the analytic concept of abstract labor – in practice. Labour "abstract in practice" is socially validated in a way that shows society's real indifference to the specific character of labour, that is, to the specific ways in which labour transforms nature and to the specific characteristics of the use-value of its final product.[95]

It turns out, then, according to Murray, that the key to the determination of value-producing labour, and therefore the key to the real existence of the commodity, is to be found in the existence of this indifferent social consciousness:

> What kind of social practice would validate the work in a way that fits this description? What kind of society would be completely indifferent to the specificity of use-values and

[93] Murray, "Marx's "Truly Social" Labour Theory of Value: Part I, Abstract Labour in Marxian Value Theory", op. cit., pp. 31-32.
[94] Ibid, p. 32, own translation.
[95] Ibid, p. 43.

> thus to the specificity of the labor necessary to produce the desired use-values? The world of the "Whatever it is!" of the generalized circulation of commodities is that society, the only one.[96]

According to Murray, indifference to the concrete form of labour does not arise from the fact that people relate to each other through the exchange of commodities as equivalent materializations of the same quantity of abstract labour, but, conversely, the exchange of commodities comes from the fact that people look indifferently at the products of their labour. So, according to Murray, the indifference in question is the cause of courage. But what is the cause of indifference?

Now, the following question arises: what makes a society so indifferent to the specificities of human needs and the types of work required to meet those needs? And how would the participants of such a society represent the question?

> … But what strange collective good is this that requires complete indifference on the part of society to the specific nature of human needs and the labor required to satisfy them? The collective goal of accumulating surplus value, which necessarily takes the form of unlimited money-making, meets the requirements perfectly, uniquely, I think.[97]

No matter how many questions Murray has asked himself so far, it does not cross his mind that he has just opened the following question: where does this eagerness to accumulate surplus value come from, which, according to him, is the cause of the value of commodities? But, even if he were aware of it, it would be difficult to answer it. Because in order to know what surplus value is, you must first know what value is. And in order to know what value is, one must first discover the determination of value-producing labor. And it turns out that Murray has put the existence of surplus value as the cause of the existence of value-producing labour. No matter how much he boasts of knowing Hegel, his development is simply based on putting science before science. Or, rather, in replacing all science with "discoveries" of the following tenor:

> Only "abstract work in practice," not labor in its physiological aspect, creates value, since labor animals are spent in the physiological sense without creating value. Because human wage workers are socially recognized as free in a specific, abstract way, they can create value.[98]

Hence it follows that the producer of commodities is not a free subject by virtue of the fact that he is subject to the domination of the commodities, but is free "in a specific way." This tells us that, for Murray, human freedom has an existence independent of its determination as a historically specific mode of organizing social production. Natural, perhaps?

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[96] Ibid, p. 44, own translation.
[97] Ibid, pp. 44-45, own translation.
[98] Ibid, p. 31, own translation.

10.2.7 Postone

Postone begins by inverting the process of discovering the determinations of the value of commodities to one of "definition" of the category "abstract labor." With this, he has already defined the form he is going to give to the process of recognizing that discovery. Instead of being confronted with abstract labour in its real existence by oneself, it is going to consist in the "interpretation" of this definition. Thanks to this displacement, the materiality of abstract labor becomes "problematic" for him:

> Moreover, the definitions of abstract human labour offered by [Marx] in Capital, Chapter One, are very problematic. They seem to indicate that it is a biological waste, which should be interpreted as the expenditure of human physiological energy.[99]

Postone's next step is to reduce the materiality of abstract labor to the condition of an abstractly social form. In the conceptual world, it suffices to identify abstract labour - that is, the material expenditure of the human body applied under any concrete productive form - with value, that is, with the representation of this material expenditure as the purely social attribute of its product, by means of which the unity of social production and consumption is established when social labour is carried out privately and independently. And, as befits in the field of interpretation, he does not hesitate to attribute to Marx the reduction of abstract labor and value to the same category:

> ... it is central to Marx's own analysis that value is understood as a historically specific form of social wealth. This being the case, its "social substance" cannot be a transhistorical natural residue, common to human labor in all social formations.[100]

For the same reason, Postone should find the following "definition" of Marx "very problematic":

> A black man is a black man. Only under certain conditions does he become a slave.[101]

The materiality of the genetically black being was the "social substance" that made a human being a slave. Or are we to believe that slavery was founded on a natural substance? Therefore, according to Postone, being genetically black cannot be a natural transhistorical trait, common to the condition of black in all social formations. But, no. Being genetically black is a trait common to all social formations, but when labor is organized under the historically specific form of forced on the basis of racial differentiation, that trait is represented as the common social substance, devoid as such of an atom of materiality, which determines a person as a slave. Similarly, abstract human labour is common to every social form, but when it is materialised in

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[99] Moishe Postone, Time, labor, and social domination. A reinterpretation of Marx's critique, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 144.
[100] Ibid, p. 145, own translation.
[101] Karl Marx, Wage Labor and Capital, Buenos Aires: Editorial Anteo, 1973, p. 36.

the historically specific form of private and independent, it is represented as the common social substance which, as such, does not contain an atom of materiality: the value of commodities.

Postone, however, clings to the inversion of abstract labour as a historical form, until he conceives of it, no longer as the activity that produces the reified social relation, but as the social relation itself between the producers of commodities. That is, according to Postone, it is not that the material labour of the commodity producers at the same time produces their general social relation in the form of a thing, but that their labour is itself the social relation which mediates between individuals. And it is this function as a social relation that determines labor as abstract (of course, with renewed imputation to Marx):

> The function of labor as a socially mediating activity is what he [Marx] calls "abstract labor."[102]

In Postone's conception, the general social relation no longer takes the form of a thing, but that of a human activity. And not just any human activity, but the conscious and voluntary activity in which the producers of commodities exercise full control over themselves, affirming themselves in it as free individuals. Postone displaces the commodity from its condition as a subject. It puts the work itself in its place. The commodity can only be a secondary expression of this subject, which is perfectly capable of expressing itself socially. In other words, Postone inverts the determinations of value as materialized labor, presenting them as if they were proper to labor in act. In their individual labour processes, the commodity producers show their lack of relation to organize their social labour at the time of its realization, so that they can only establish the unity of their process of social metabolism a posteriori through their already materialised labour. This fact is reversed, according to Postone, in the fact that what commodity producers are doing in their private labor processes is realizing their social relation. Private work and social labor have become the same thing. Only in this way can labor in act and materialized labor, i.e., the product of labor, be put into account as two indistinct forms of the general social relation in the capitalist mode of production:

> In a society characterized by the universality of commodity form [...] labor itself – whether directly or expressed in its products – replaces these [open social] relations by serving as an "objective" means through which the products of others are acquired. Work itself constitutes social mediation rather than open social relations. That is, a new form of interdependence emerges: No one consumes what he produces, but the labor or products of each one nevertheless function as the necessary means to obtain the products of others.[103]

10.2.8 Rubin

However different the last conceptions we have just seen may seem, in all of them elements of the same source are recognized, namely, the conceptions of Isaak Rubin. Elsewhere I have developed extensively the critique of Rubin, emphasizing his inversion of the dialectical

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[102] Postone, Time, labor, and social domination. A reinterpretation of Marx's critical theory, op. cit., p. 150.
[103] Postone, Time, labor, and social domination. A reinterpretation of Marx's critical theory, op. cit., p. 150.

method as a logical representation.[104] Here I am going to state this critique more succinctly, focusing especially on the question of the specificity of value-producing labor. However, since Rubin is the starting point of the entire second great line of Marxist political economy, and in view of the weight acquired by this line today, I am going to present the question in more detail than I have done with the previous authors.

To begin with, Rubin's world is made up of the interweaving of concepts:

> It follows that the concept of abstract labour, in our scheme, directly precedes the concept of value.[105]

Far from freeing him from contradictions, his world of concepts is full of them. If the concept of abstract labour precedes that of value, then it follows that the concept of value must first be defined in order to fit the construction of the concept of abstract labour into it:

> There can be only one way out of these difficulties: since the concept of value has a social and historical character [...], we must construct the concept of abstract labor that creates value on the same basis.[106]

As Rubín does, let us overlook the circularity of this reasoning and follow it in the construction of his concept of abstract labor:

> [If the definition of that] is accepted Abstract labor is the expenditure of human energy as such, independently of the forms given [...]. The concept of abstract work is a physiological concept, devoid of any social and historical element. The concept of abstract labor exists in all historical epochs, regardless of this or that social form of production.[107]

In order to pass from the materiality of abstract labor to the world of the interweaving of concepts, Rubin needs to resort to the absurdity of affirming that "the concept of abstract labor," that is, the representation in thought of the materiality of abstract labor and not this materiality itself, has existed in all historical epochs. But in this way the question has gone from being settled on the terrain of concrete existence to becoming a question of "interpretation of texts":

> Marx never tired of repeating that value is a social phenomenon, that the existence of value [...] "has a purely social materiality" [...]. and it does not contain a single atom of matter. It follows that abstract labour, which creates value, must be understood as a

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[104] Juan Iñigo Carrera, Capital: Historical Reason, Revolutionary Subject and Consciousness, Buenos Aires: Ediciones Imago Mundi, 2013, pp. 321-348

[105] Isaak Rubín, Essays on the Marxist Theory of Value, Buenos Aires: Cuadernos de Pasado y Presente, 1974, vol. 53, p. 170.

[106] Ibid, p. 189.

[107] Ibid, p. 186.

> social category in which we cannot find an atom of matter.... The physiological expenditure of energy as such is the same for all times and, we could say, this energy created value in all times. We come to the crudest interpretation of the theory of value, which flatly contradicts Marx's theory.[108]

And it turns out that Marx himself comes out badly from Rubin's interpretation of his texts. According to Rubin, where Marx, for the first time in human history, fully unfolds the determinations of the materiality of abstract labor in the course of discovering it as the substance of value when social labor is performed privately and independently, he was not only regressing with respect to his previous work, but he was behaving like an incoherent person who wrote "sentences" that, "literally," "cannot in any way be compatible with the totality of his theory of value":

> We can see that most authors understood abstract work in a simplified way, in the sense of physiological work. This is due to the fact that these authors did not follow Marx's theory of abstract labor in its entirety. To do this, they would have had to carry out a detailed analysis of Marx's text in the section on commodity fetishism, and in particular of the Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, where Marx developed his theory more fully. Instead, these authors preferred to limit themselves to a literal repetition of a few sentences that Marx devoted to abstract work in the second section of Chapter I of Capital. In the above-mentioned section of Capital, Marx does indeed seem to provide a basis for the interpretation of abstract labour precisely in a physiological sense: [...] Neither [defenders] nor [opponents of Marx] observe that the simplified conception of abstract labour [...], based at first sight on a literal interpretation of Marx's words, cannot in any way be compatible with the whole of Marx's theory of value, nor with a number of passages in Capital.[109]

Here again we find ourselves with the Marxist falsification, which instead of assuming as its own its own its developments opposed to those of Marx, foists them on Marx under the title of "what he really meant".[110] For this reason, it is worth recalling here those "few phrases" regarding abstract human labor that, according to Rubín, must be interpreted against their own literality: "a productive expenditure of the human brain, of muscle, of nerves, of arm, etc.", "expenditure of human labor power in the physiological sense", "it is an incontrovertible physiological truth that all these activities [...] they represent an essential expenditure of the human brain, nerves, muscles, senses, etc.", "expenditure of human labour power".[111] Nor is it superfluous to note that this last characterization of abstract labor is already found in The

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[108] Ibid, p. 189.

[109] Rubin, Essays on the Marxist Theory of Value, op. cit., p. 188.

[110] Sweezy, Theory of Capitalist Development, op. cit., p. 18. Sweezy leaves the rest behind, stating: "In this respect we make the simplifying, though perhaps not obvious, assumption that he meant what he said" With what we have seen of the way in which Sweezy reduces the form of value to its substance, and private labor to social labor, it is certainly a not at all obvious assumption.

[111] Karl Marx, Capital, Mexico, DF: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1973, volume I, pp. 11, 13, 37 and 39.

Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, which Rubin invokes but seems to be unaware of:

> In other words, labor as it is presented in exchange values could be described as general human labor. This abstraction of general human labor exists in the average labor that can be performed by every average individual in a given society, it is a determined productive expenditure of human muscles, nerves, brain, etc.[112]

Rubin finds it incomprehensible that abstract labor is a material process, whose very materiality is transformed into the materiality of its product. And that it is this materialized material labor that, when carried out privately and independently, is represented as the capacity of commodities to exchange, constituting as such representation, their value. That is, by constituting itself in a social form, value, which, as such, does not contain in itself a single atom of materiality. It is nothing but the way in which the material unity of social production and consumption is organized, through the allocation of the total labor power of society to the various concrete useful works to be performed by each producer privately and independently. Abstract labor is of a purely material nature; it is its representation, once materialized in the commodity, as the capacity of the latter to be exchanged, which has a purely social existence.

Perhaps it might seem that, moving so comfortably in a world of concepts, it would have been enough for Rubin to understand the relationship between the materiality of abstract labor and its representation as the social attribute of its product if he only stopped to observe that ideas, the product of the electrochemical materiality of the thought process and expressed in the materiality of a print, they do not contain in themselves an atom of materiality. But, as logic dictates, for Rubín ideas are ideas and material processes are material processes, so that the former cannot be the way the latter is presented. Although, as we will see a little later, he has no problem conceiving the determination in the opposite direction. And, oh surprise, he has no problem conceiving that what is absolutely material and common to all forms of social life is transformed into that which cannot contain an atom of materiality and be proper only to commodity production:

> The transformation of private labour into social labour can only be effected by the transformation of concrete labour into abstract labour. On the other hand, the transformation of concrete labour into abstract labour already means its inclusion in the mass of homogeneous social labour, i.e., its transformation into social labour. Abstract labor is the variety of social labor or socially equalized labor in general. It is socially or socially equalized labor in the specific form it has in a commodity economy.[113]

According to Rubin, abstract labour - which could not have an atom of materiality on pain of "flatly contradicting Marx's theory" - is nothing but concrete labour - which, by its very

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[112] Karl Marx, Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, Buenos Aires: Ediciones Estudio, 1973, p. 19.

[113] Rubin, Essays on the Marxist Theory of Value, op. cit., p. 196.

materiality, intervenes only in the determination of the material attributes of the commodity as use-value and is obviously a condition for any form of organisation of social production - "transformed". And through this "transformation," private labor is "transformed" into social labor. Hence it follows that, in commodity production, abstract labour is not private and independent labour, but, by the mere fact of being abstract labour, is social labour.

What is the nature of the Rubinian transformation that work undergoes? Does it happen at the moment when labor has its present existence, that is, in the process of labor? No, it happens when work no longer exists as such, in the process of change:

> As a consequence of the process of exchange, the product and labor of the commodity producer are subjected to substantial changes.[114]

And who has this fantastic power to transform *concrete* and private work into abstract and social labor post factum? Gold acting as money:

> How can the social character of work be expressed in change? If a dress is the product of a tailor's private labor, then we can say that the sale of the dress, or its exchange for gold, equates the tailor's private labor with another form of private labor, namely, that of the gold producer. How can the equating of a private job with a private job give the former a social character? This is possible only if the private labour of the gold producer is already on an equal footing with all other concrete forms of labour, i.e., if his product, gold, can be exchanged directly for any other product, and consequently if it plays the role of a general equivalent, or money. The work of the tailor, since it is equated with the work of the gold producer, is also equated and linked with all concrete forms of labor. Equated with them as a form of labor equivalent to them, the tailor's labor is transformed from concrete, general, or abstract. Being connected to others in the unified system of total social labor, the tailor's labor is transformed from private labor into social labor.[115]
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> In reality we define abstract labour as labour which has been equalised through the general equalisation of all the products of labour, but the equalisation of all the products of labour is not possible except through the assimilation of each of them with a general equivalent.[116]

According to Rubin, commodities are not the materialization of the contradictory double unity of concrete and abstract labor, and of private labor and social labor, at the very moment of their production. On the contrary, Rubin conceives of commodities simply as the product of concrete, private labor at the moment of their production. Consequently, he also does not see that change is the synthesis of this contradictory unity under the appearance of being resolved (and, therefore, the moment in which it can be immediately manifested precisely because it

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[114] Ibid, p. 179.

[115] Ibid, p. 182.

[116] Isaak Rubin, "Abstract Labor and Value in Marx's System," in Debates in Value Theory, ed. by Simon Mohum, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994, p. 48.

seems already superseded), where the products of different private and concrete labors are equated with each other insofar as they are materializations of equivalent quantities of social and abstract labor. For Rubin, commodities are directly related to each other in exchange as products of distinct private and concrete labor. And then it happens that change transforms a posteriori the concrete and private labor itself materialized in them, into abstract and social. This transformation of one labor into another occurs because commodities meet in exchange with the product of one of those merely concrete and private labors, gold, already determined as the general equivalent of all of them.

But where, according to Rubin, would such a power have gotten the gold? Gold is not money by nature. Gold acquires the social determination of money, in a substantive way from the general equivalent, insofar as it itself begins to be an ordinary commodity.[117] So the exchange of commodities as equivalents does not presuppose the existence of money, but, conversely, it is the very development of the simple exchange of commodities as equivalents that engenders money. But the exchange of commodities, the equalization of two different use-values in the exchange relation, presupposes their commensurability. In turn, this commensurability presupposes that both contain a qualitatively common substance. As equivalents of what common substance are Rubin's commodities exchanged as soon as they are considered by themselves, i.e., before in the course of exchange one of them earns money? Or, in other words, what common substance is represented as the simple exchange capacity of commodities according to Rubin? Or, more simply, what determines according to Rubin the simple exchangeability of commodities as equivalents?

Abstract socially necessary labor cannot be, since this presupposes, according to Rubin, either an unacceptable "physiological" concept, or the existence of the general equivalent. But, in giving us the example of the exchange of clothing for gold, it is enough for us to consider gold as a simple commodity for Rubin's answer to be evident. For him, the product of a particular private labour, that which produces clothing, is exchanged with the product of another concrete private labour, that which produces gold, without any common substance being involved in this exchange. Moreover, he believes that it is the other way around, that it is an attribute of exchange itself to equate these concrete private labours: "the sale of clothing, or its exchange for gold, equates the private labour of the tailor with another form of private labour, namely, that of the producer of gold." Instead of asking himself about the determination of commodities which takes concrete form as their capacity to exchange as equivalents, i.e., as their value, Rubin inverts the relation, and presents value as determined by the realization of exchange itself. That is, it is not that commodities are exchangeable because they are materializations of equal quantity of socially necessary abstract labor, but, conversely, they are the product of equal quantity of socially necessary abstract labor because they are exchanged. Instead of explaining

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[117] To recall it in Marx's terms:

> The germ of the money-form is therefore already contained in the simple form of the commodity. .. It is not money that makes commodities commensurable, but the other way around: since all commodities, considered as values, are materialized human labour, and therefore commensurable in themselves, it is by this reason that all their values can be measured in the same specific commodity and this become their common measure of value. that is, in money (Marx, Capital, op. cit., vol. I, pp. 36 and 56).

exchange by value - that is, by the attribute that commodities have from the moment they are produced by socially useful labour performed privately and independently and which in exchange will reveal their existence - he tries to explain value by the fact that commodities are exchanged for money. Rubin's entire conceptual construction is based on the most vulgar fetishism of money. He assigns to gold, in itself, not only the power of converting commodities into exchangeable objects, but the still more fantastic power of transforming the nature of an activity that occurred and ended in the past: the exchange for gold converts labor, of which only its material result exists at that time, from concrete to abstract.

Having resorted to the crude fetishism of money as the foundation of his theory of value, Rubin attempts to erase this fact by indignantly claiming that he has said the opposite of what he literally has just said:

> Some critics say that our conception may lead to the conclusion that abstract labour originates only in the act of exchange, from which it follows that value also originates only in exchange. However, from Marx's point of view, value, and therefore also abstract labour, must already exist in the production process.[118]
> Well, what existence does abstract labor have for Rubín at the moment of production? In the process of direct production, labour is not yet abstract labour in the full sense of the word; it has yet to become (werden) abstract work.[119]

The categorical assertion that abstract labour "must already exist in the process of production" has now become a duty to exist in the "not full sense of the word". Where is this realm of existence located in the non-full sense? Rubín has defined it a little earlier:

> Thus change is above all a form of the process of production, or a form of social labour. Since change is really the dominant form of the production process, it imprints its stamp on the phase of direct production.... Even if the commodity producer is still in the workshop and at a certain moment has not yet entered into the exchange with other members of society, he already feels the pressure of all those people who enter the market as his buyers, competitors, people who compare his competitors, etc., in the last analysis. the pressure of all members of society.... In other words, we recognize that, from the moment that exchange becomes the dominant form of social labor and people produce especially for exchange, the character of the product of labor as value is taken into consideration in the phase of direct production. But this character of the product of labour as value is not yet that character which it acquires when it is in fact exchanged for money, when, in Marx's terms, its "ideal" value is transformed into "real" value and the social form of commodities is replaced by the social form of money.[120]

The realm of "existence in the non-full sense of the word" of abstract labour in the

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[118] Rubin, Essays on the Marxist Theory of Value, op. cit., p. 201.
[119] Ibid, p. 205.
[120] Rubin, Essays on the Marxist Theory of Value, op. cit., p. 204.

process of production is none other than the spirit of the commodity producer, his mind, affected by social pressure! Of course, this means quite simply that, for Rubin, abstract labor exists only ideally in the process of production. This is a strange place of existence for a "job," whatever its nature.

Let's say it again. Work is the action in which a human individual spends his body consciously and voluntarily, applying this expenditure of his person in a specific way to his object in order to convert it into a use value for human life. Every determination of the work must be fully present at the time of the action; Once the work is done, there is no longer any attribute of it that can arise, develop or change. In production, labor is not something that resides in the head of the producer, but production is the realization of the fullness of labor in the unity of its determinations. Therefore, any attribute of work must be fully realized at the moment when the work is done, at the moment of action. Then, in the change, labor no longer exists by itself, all that exists is its product. Thus, at the moment of change, work can no longer undergo any transformation, much less be realized. What really happens in commodity production is that the work performed privately and independently is socially useful or useless at the moment it is performed, but one or another condition of it becomes apparent only at the moment of change.

But in Rubin's world:

> Abstract labour and value are created or "occur", "become" in the direct process of production [...] and are only realized in the process of exchange.[121]

For Rubin, abstract labor is not an action that is performed in production, but a fantastic something that is ideally "created, occurs, becomes" in production, and that is "realized" in exchange, that is, where there is no productive action at all, where those who are related are the products of labor and, therefore, it exists only as an action performed in the past.

Rubin's idealistic inversions don't stop there. According to him, concepts are what determine real forms:

> It could be said that this concept of abstract labor must be taken as the basis, as the content and substance of value.[122]

Value, a real social relation, has for its content and substance ... a concept. Alas, Hegel! It is that, in Rubin, the ideal constructions, the products of consciousness, appear to determine by themselves the social form of the product of labor:

> The theory of fetishism is, per se, the basis of Marx's entire economic system, and in particular of his theory of value. ... The theory of commodity fetishism is transformed [...] into a propaedeutic for political economy.[123]

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[121] Rubin, "Abstract Labor and Value in Marx's System," op. cit., p. 56.
[122] Rubin, Essays on the Marxist Theory of Value, op. cit., p. 1-70.
[123] Ibid, pp. 53-54.

In the real world, the society of free individuals, insofar as they are not subject to the personal domination of others, assigns their total material availability of labour power to the various concrete useful forms of labour indirectly: each individual spends the quota of social labour power of which he is materially the bearer privately and independently. and, once materialized in its product in a socially useful way, this simple expenditure of human labour-power—this abstract labour—is represented as a social attribute of its product, as the ability of this product to relate to its fellows in exchange—that is, as the value of commodities—thus indirectly relating socially to its producers. Since they have no control over the social character of their labors, they must submit their consciousness and will as free individuals to this social power of the product of their labors and therefore alien to them. Their free consciousness is the concrete form in which the alienation of their consciousness in the commodity is realized. Hence what is nothing more than their own general social relation is presented to them as if it sprang from the very materiality of the products of their labours, as if it were a natural attribute of their labours. Commodity fetishism, i.e., the manifestation of the alienated consciousness of those who perform their social labor privately and independently, is a necessary concrete form of this historically specific way of realizing the organization of the material process of social metabolism. The discovery of the determinations of commodity fetishism is the result of the course opened up by the knowledge of the commodity.

In Rubin's inverted world, the fetishism of the commodity, i.e., the form of consciousness, is, "per se," the basis that explains the determination of the form that the social relation, i.e., value, the commodity, takes. For him, it is not the social relation objectified as a commodity that determines the fetishistic consciousness of the commodity producer, but, conversely, it is the fetishistic consciousness that determines the commodity as a social relation, that makes the products of labor exchangeable objects, by consecrating gold as the general expression of social labor.

However much Rubin claims that it is a certain degree of development of the productive forces that determines commodity relations, he puts the consciousness that springs from these relations before the development of them. Such an inversion is only possible if one starts by making consciousness independent of its determination as the concrete way of governing the materiality of the labor process. To this end, the materiality of human life and social relations must be emptied of their true unity as the realization of content in its necessary form, in order to be conceived as two parallel worlds that relate externally to each other in some mode of functional correspondence. Let's follow Rubin step by step, what he means here, sentence by sentence. Step 1:

> There is a close connection and correspondence between the process of the production of material goods and the social form in which it is carried out, that is, the totality of the relations of production between men.[124]

If the terms "connection and correspondence" may be evidencing an external relation

[124] Rubin, Essays on the Marxist Theory of Value, op. cit., p. 61

between two given existences, the expression "the social form in which the production of material goods is carried out" implies the absence of any externality. The form is such only because of its content. So, up to this point, the relations of production are nothing more than the concrete form of social organization of material production. They are, therefore, the necessary concrete form in which the productive forces of society develop. Step 2:

> The given totality of relations of production between men is regulated by a definite condition of the productive forces, i.e., the process of material production.[125]

Now there is already a "given totality" of relations of production which is not the necessary concrete form which brings about the development of the material productive forces of social labour, but which retains with this materiality the relation of being regulated by it. Step 3:

> This totality makes possible, within certain limits, the process of production of material products indispensable to society.[126]

From being the concrete form of material production, the relations of production have become an existence that "makes possible" material production. The unity of content and form has been reduced to the externality of the functional relationship. And not only this, but the relations of production have taken on the property of having limits to their functionality. Step 4:

> The correspondence between the material process of production, on the one hand, and the relations of production between the individuals participating in it, on the other, takes place differently in different social formations.[127]

Here mutual externality is already consecrated by the above-mentioned petty-bourgeois dialectic of "on the one hand" and "on the other hand." Step 5:

> [In a socialist society] The unity that exists at the beginning allows a correspondence between the technical-material process of production and the relations of production that shape it. Later, each of these elements is developed on the basis of a predetermined plan. Each element has its internal logic, but because of the initial unity, no contradiction arises between them.[128]

Now, the externality of the "on the one hand" and "on the other side" has become that the materiality of labor and relations of production are sufficiently autonomous from each other to have their own internal movement. Social relations are no longer the concrete form of organization of the material production of society but the concrete form of themselves. But, of

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[125] Ibid, p. 61.
[126] Ibid, p. 61
[127] Ibid, p. 61
[128] Ibid, p. 62.

course, in socialist society they do not enter into contradiction with that other content which has no concrete form other than itself, material production. Step 6:

> [In commodity-capitalist society] The socio-economic aspects (relations between people) and the objective-material aspects (movement of things within the production process) are inextricably linked in the process of change. In commodity-capitalist society, these two aspects are not organized in advance, nor adjusted to each other.... In normal times, such divergence does not go beyond certain limits, but in times of crisis it becomes catastrophic.[129]

Already the relation between material content and its social form is not only completely external, but only takes place indissolubly in exchange; and not even there. But there is more. Social relations themselves have been divided into social relations and economic relations (what else does the opposition of the social to the economic mean in the socio-economic? Now, the unity between the material content of the process of human metabolism and its realization in the concrete form of social relations has been reduced to the field of abstract economic relations, and not even to it. Social relations, what is said, social relations, can now move free of all material content.

Where, then, should these abstract social relations go? Free from being determined as forms of the materiality of social production, because where people's consciousness takes them. But would it not be a consciousness inevitably carrying the fetishism of the commodity? Step 7:

> The social form of the product of labor, being the result of innumerable transactions between commodity producers, becomes a powerful means of exerting pressure on the motivation of individual commodity producers, forcing them to adapt their behavior to the dominant types of production relations between people in that society. The influence of society on the individual is realized through the social form of things. This objectification or "reification" of the relations of production between people in the social form of things, gives the economic system greater durability, stability and regularity.[130]

It now turns out that, in the capitalist mode of production, people do not have a certain form of consciousness - the consciousness which fetishizes the material product of their material labour - because they organize their material process of social metabolism through the production of commodities, but that this consciousness, their own social being, is nothing more than the result imposed on them by the "influence of society" on supposed "motivations" which would reside in an abstract consciousness autonomous of individuals. Oh, Rousseau! At the same time, the reification of the relations of production is not the necessary concrete way in which the materiality of the process of social metabolism is organized when social labor is carried out privately and independently. According to Rubines, it is merely a resource (which springs from the "motivation" to "exert pressure" on others, perhaps?), to give an "economic

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[129] Ibid, pp. 65-66.

[130] Rubin, Essays on the Marxist Theory of Value, op. cit., p. 72.

system", abstracted from the unity of its material content and the social form of this content, "greater durability, stability and regularity".

Classical and neoclassical political economy naturalize the appearance of the abstractly free consciousness of the commodity producer by identifying the specific social forms of commodity production with the materiality of the human life process. Rubin achieves the same naturalization by resorting to a path that pretends to start from the recognition of the historical specificity of the consciousness of the commodity producer. But already in its first step, it empties free consciousness of its completion as a necessary concrete form of alienated consciousness, by emptying of materiality the socially necessary abstract labor performed privately and independently, and replacing this materiality with a purely ideal existence. The establishment of the exchange relation does not arise, then, as an expression of this materiality. On the contrary, it is established in a direct way without any material determination, other than by attributing the property of exchange to objects that have been materially reduced to having nothing in common, which are confronted with another material object that has the fantastic power to make abstract labor pass from ideality to reality. In this world of inversions, free consciousness and alienated consciousness are presented as split. The second becomes a social determination external to the producer's own being. What is this being, then? The mere fact of conceiving the alienated consciousness as something that imposes itself on it externally, implies conceiving the pre-existence of the consciousness of this being as an unalienated consciousness, that is, as a free consciousness. But this free consciousness cannot have its source in the fact that the organization of! social labor is carried out privately and independently, since Rubin only sees alienated consciousness sprout from this mode of organization. It must therefore be a question of a consciousness external to the very determinations of the general social relation of the producers of commodities. This means, perforce, that it is conceived as a naturally free consciousness.

Free consciousness is but a historically specific product to commodity production. But, here, it appears inverted as an attribute inherent, by nature, to the human being. Human history is no longer the history of the material development of human labor and the ways in which it is socially organized. It has been inverted under the appearance of being the history of the different ways in which the oppression exercised by one part of society imposes itself on the natural freedom of the other part. Thus oppression itself appears to have no more determination than an equally natural will to exercise it. Thus every need to overcome the capitalist mode of production is reduced to the action of a consciousness and will which, in its own development of its own accord, moving in the world of abstract "social relations" emptied of all material content, resolves to free itself from the pressure exerted on it by "the dominant types of relations of production." thereby sweeping away the "durability" of the capitalist "economic system".

Let us now confront this mode of abstracting free consciousness from its historically necessary content of alienated consciousness, proper to the second strand of Marxist political economy, with that which is proper to the first aspect. This first strand realizes this abstraction by resorting to the emptying of the value of its historical specificity by reducing its necessary form, exchange value, to its abstract labor content. We have seen the different ways in which he appeals to produce this reduction: to conceive of value as synonymous with labor, to suppose

that value is expressed in quantities of labor, or to conceive of value as determined by the pre-established unit of social production and consumption. Whatever the case, commodity-producing labour is represented as its opposite, i.e., as directly social labour. The second strand makes the same abstraction of free consciousness by appealing to the inverse resource of reducing the substance of value, the materiality of socially necessary abstract labor, to the appearance of its immediate form as exchange value. He thus conceives of this materiality as if it were also a historically specific form. Emptied of its materiality, abstract labor takes the place of private labor.

This community in the cultivation of the naturalization of free consciousness separated from the historically specific form in which the materiality of the process of social metabolism is organized, and therefore from the very development of the material productive forces of society, by means of two apparently irreconcilable reductions of the determinations of value, refers to a concrete root. This is the discussion opened at the beginning of the Soviet Union around the question of whether planning posed as "socialist" could be carried out on the basis of value or only on the basis of use values.

In the first place, both the conception that reduced the value form to its content, and that which reduced the value content to its form, expressed the ideological need to declare that the capitalist mode of production, and therefore the private character of labor, was superseded, thanks to the action of a consciousness that had decided to liberate its freedom from capitalist alienation. With this reversal as a starting point, the first strand of Marxist economics sought to make it appear that, if planning was carried out in "values," it was not because the product of labor continued to confront its producers as a social power alien to them and dominating them, but because value was so naturally inherent in the product of human labor that it continued to exist in socialism. The difference was that it could now at last express itself in the purity of its substance, in working time.[131] For the second strand, the abolition of commodity fetishism by free consciousness implied the abolition of abstract labor and, hence, of private labor. So the obvious evidences of the subsistence of commodities and their exchange relations could have no other content than to express the proportionalities previously established by the plan between "socially equal labors." At the same time, by having emptied abstract labour of its materiality, and with it of the value of its determination as the necessary form of organising this materiality by the private realisation of social labour, it left out of place even the mere question of the role played by abstract labour in the organisation of social labour in the USSR.

Both sides were but two ideological attempts to dispel the contradiction that, if the USSR was a society in which the private character of labour had been superseded, there was no room for the exchange of commodities.[132] Therefore, planning could not have any immediate axis

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[131] For example:

> In 1920, S. G. Strumilin advocated the use of the tred (from the Russian trudovaya edinitsa or "unit of work") as the common denominator for planning, but the Central Statistical Administration of the USSR was unable to manage the task (Allin Cottrell and Paul Cockshott, "Socialist planning after the collapse of the Soviet Union", in Revue européenne des sciences sociales, vol. XXXI (1993), p. 103).

[132] Thus, Bukharin stated that:

> ... As a conscious social regulator replaces the elemental force, the commodity is transformed into

other than use values. And yet, as we have seen, it was justified by the elaborations of the Academy of Sciences and openly declared by Stalin, when it came to individual consumption and the reproduction of social labor power, Soviet planning made it clear that social labor was nothing more than a concrete way of organizing social labor in a private way. That is, of organizing a social labor whose product confronted its own producers as the bearer of social powers that escaped their control.

So empty of real content were both conceptions of value that they did not even serve to support the planning practice in question. The first, because, since it was the planning of a social labor whose private form was manifested in the impotence to establish a priori the unity between production and consumption, this planning had to be carried out in response to the determinations of value. And this cannot be expressed in quantities of labor. Therefore, the planning of such private labor as an alienated attribute in the social powers of its product could not be handled in supposed units of abstract labor.[133] But neither could the latter give concrete support to the practice of planning. While this practice had to face the evidence of the imbalances that arose from not being able to fully control the social determinations of labor, Rubin's theory limited itself to affirming that material production and relations of production were two spheres of harmony presupposed in socialist society. Moreover, by recognizing the determination of the form of value by private labor, it was a theory which, contrary to its own ideological intentions, could not conceal the fact that the existence of commodities and money in the USSR corresponded to the subsistence of the domination of private labor in the USSR. Hence, both strands ended up becoming useless even as mere ideological constructions, and their place was occupied, first by the coarseness of the Manual and1 finally, by neoclassical apologetics.

10.2.9 Sohn-Rethel

Sohn-Rethel begins by noting that his "research focuses on the relationship between base and superstructure, in the Marxist sense of the expression," and remarks as its "most innovative and surprising element [...] the modification that Marx has to introduce in the analysis of commodities bequeathed to us", and then adds what he defines as the "intellectual superstructure".[134] Since Marx starts his analysis from asking about the "substance and the

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> a product and loses its commodity character.... Consequently, value, as a category of the capitalist commodity system in its equilibrium, is of the least useful for the transitional period, in which commodity production largely disappears and where equilibrium is absent (Nicolai Bukharin, Economic Theory of the Transitional Period, Cordoba: Cuadernos de Pasado y Presente, 1972, vol. 29, pp. 94-95).

[133] It is remarkable how the current practitioners of the reduction of the value form to its substance, today a pillar of "socialism of the twenty-first century", can give no other reason for this impossibility than the "natural" imposition of one conscience on the freedom of another:

> That it [the idea of using working-time accounting] was not seriously adopted in the USSR must reflect, we think, the economic interests of those with power and influence in that society (Cottrell and Cockshott, "Socialist planning after the collapse of the Soviet Union," op. cit., p. 181).

[134] Alfred Sohn-Rethel, Trabajo intelectual y trabajo manual, Barcelona: Ediciones 2001, 1979, pp. 7 and 12

magnitude of value," let us start here from what Sohn-Rethel finds about this substance and its magnitude:

> The human labour involved in the production of what serves as money and in the production of the commodities exchanged with it, determines the magnitude of its value, the proportion in which commodities are exchanged.[135]

According to Sohn-Rethel, commodity-producing labor is in itself a labor from which all historical specificity is absent because it is performed privately and independently, and every general quality as a simple physiological expenditure of human labor power from which results the homogeneity that underlies the fact of possessing a quantitative term. As far as the substance and magnitude of the value is concerned, Sohn-Rethel's analysis is based on not containing "a more innovative and surprising element" than the regression to Ricardo. Consequently, when he has to pass from the content of value to the necessary form which it takes as exchange-value, i.e., as the exchange-relation between two commodities, he finds that he has no way of explaining its historical specificity except by appealing to the same manifestation of this form:

> They simply agree that the two batches of goods are interchangeable. Following this agreement, these goods are transferred from one to the other. ... The fact that the transfer takes place on this basis equals the two batches of goods, however different they may be. They are equalized by the fact that they are exchanged; they are not exchanged for the fact of possessing equality. ... To be more explicit. The transformation of human relations into relations between things, or, in other words, the "reifying" property (Verdinglichende) of exchange is closely related to the equalizing effect that the act of exchange has on the exchanged objects.[136]

According to Sohn-Rethel, commodities do not enter into the relation of equality that is exchange because they possess a common quality of equal magnitude that is manifested in that relation, but they are equalized in exchange because they are exchanged. That is, it is not that change is explained by the specific attribute that makes the products of social labor performed privately and independently exchangeable objects, values, but that the changeability of commodities is explained by the fact that they are exchanged. This is, without a doubt, another "innovative and surprising element" compared to the development made by Marx, who points out in this regard:

> Let us now take two commodities [...] Whatever proportion they are changed, it can always be represented by an equality [...] What does this equality tell us? That in the two distinct objects [...] there is contained a common something of equal magnitude. ... The properties of an object do not arise from its relation to other objects, since this relation

[135] Ibid, p. 15.
[136] Ibid, p. 51.

only confirms them.[137]

This, of course, does not prevent Sohn-Rethel from attributing to Marx the abstraction of the substance of value, of value itself and of the form of value, which he is practicing:

Marx points out again and again that the concept of value does not imply any reference to labor.[138]

It matters little to Sohn-Rethel that Marx explicitly says the opposite:

> Aristotle also warns that the relation of value in which this expression of value is contained is, in turn, a conditioned relation, since the house is qualitatively equated to beds, and if there were not some substantial equality, these bodily distinct objects could not be related to each other as commensurable magnitudes. ... But when he arrives here, he stops and renounces any further analysis of the form of value. ... Aristotle himself tells us, then, what he stumbles into in carrying out his analysis: he stumbles in the lack of a concept of value. Where is the same, the common substance that the house represents with respect to the roofs, in the expression of their value? [...] The house represents with respect to the beds a something-equal insofar as it represents that which is really equal in both objects, namely, human labor. ... Aristotle could not decipher for himself, by analyzing the form of value, the fact that in the form of commodity values all labor is expressed as equal human labor, and therefore as equivalent, because Greek society was based on the labor of slaves and therefore had as its natural basis the inequality between men and their labor powers.[139]

So grotesque becomes Sohn-Rethel's need to sustain his inverted abstraction from the determination of the changeability of commodities that he needs to invest the real attribute of commodities as exchangeable objects, i.e., the value of commodities, not even in a concept, but in a "term" devoid of "conceptual content of its own" introduced in order to "understand" the quantitative uniformity present in "the facts of exchange":

> The contradiction between the postulated equality and the empirical difference of commodities is of such a nature that it could not be understood without the introduction of the term "value," so that equality can be considered as "equivalence" in relation to exchange. But value does not create equality, it is only applied "post-festum". The term, by itself, as with value in exchange, has no conceptual content of its own, nor definable logical substance. It simply serves to articulate contradictory social relations uniformly by quantitatively differentiating things according to the facts of exchange.[140]

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[137] Marx, Capital, op. cit., vol. I, pp. 4-5 and 24.
[138] Sohn-Rethel, Intellectual Labor and Manual Work, op. cit., p. 53.
[139] Marx, Capital, op. cit., vol. I, p. 26.
[140] Sohn-Rethel, Intellectual Labor and Manual Work, op. cit., p. 53.

But for Sohn-Rethel, to consider the phenomenon itself as the cause of the phenomenon of change is only a necessary step in completing his abstract reversal of the determination of the substance of value and of its form:

> ... Being the product of labor is not a property that affects commodities and money in the exchange relation from which abstraction arises. Abstraction does not arise from labor, but from exchange as a particular mode of social interrelation, and it is precisely through exchange that abstraction affects labor by turning it into "abstract human labor."[141]

Now it turns out that the realization of the exchange relation "affects" labor, hitherto with no other quality than that of the concept arising from the understanding proper to classical political economy, and "converts" it into "abstract." That is to say, it is not the substance of commodity value that determines the realization of that value in the form of exchange value, but it is the form taken by the realization of commodity value in exchange that determines the substance of exchange. A sort of fourth Thomistic way of the passage from the being "labor" to the being "abstract labor," because of the act of Being "relation of exchange." Sohn-Rethel's inversion even forgets that, at the moment of change, labor no longer exists as such, and all that remains of it is its materialization in the product. Thus, the late "conversion into the abstract" has no way of giving attributes to labor in its condition of producing the substance of value.

Sohn-Rethel himself synthesizes the character of the true abstraction that his analysis brings into play:

> The form and magnitude of value come from different sources, the first from exchange and the second from labor. The critique of political economy depends on the understanding of the way in which the two combine to become "abstract human labour", constituting at the same time the form and the substance of value.[142]

On the one hand, there is the form of value, i.e., exchange-value, abstracted from its content and thus reduced to having as its source the very appearance of the phenomenon of exchange. On the other hand, there is the source of value, reduced to the determination of its magnitude, so that value appears emptied of the necessity of taking form as exchange-value. The dialectic of this double abstraction, then, consists in "understanding" how one part and the other part are "combined" in such a way as to "convert" the two sources into one, which by this combination becomes "abstract human labour" and "constitutes" the unity of form and substance of value.

Marx defines as abstract the materiality of labor once it has been abstracted from the useful concrete forms in which it is performed, so that it only remains of being a productive expenditure of the human body. Then, he gives an account of why, once this expenditure has been made privately in a concrete socially useful form, that same expenditure determines its product as a value-bearing commodity in the corresponding magnitude. Sohn-Rethel begins by

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[141] Ibid, pp. 15-16.
[142] Ibid, p. 17.

inverting determination, putting form as the cause of substance: it is the fact of producing value that determines labor as abstract. And then the reason for the substance is reduced to that of a mere name:

> Value-producing labor is determined as "abstractly human labor" in order to distinguish it from concrete labor, which produces use-values.[143]

Sohn-Rethel's "abstract human labor" has no other content than that it is an inverted abstraction of the content and form of the objectified social relation, practiced by himself. And this abstraction remains inverted, no matter how much he tries to endorse it by attributing his own inversion to Marx:

> Marx emphatically observes that even labour, as the determining cause of the magnitude and substance of value, becomes "abstract human labour", human labour in general [["als solcher nur überhaupt" in the original, i.e., "as such only in general"]].[144]

Marx's development that abstract human labour materialised in a private and independent way determines the substance and magnitude of the value of the commodity is "emphatically" reversed at the hands of Sohn-Rethel: as a result of having been "combined" with the realization of exchange, "labour" *Sans phrase* up to that point, it becomes "abstract human work". *In reality, the content determines the necessity of its form; in the inverted dialectic of Sohn-Rethel, the form determines the necessity of its content.*

For Sohn-Rethel, abstract labor is a labor so "as such only in general," that it lacks all material existence and exists only in the inverted world made up of concepts of the "intellectual superstructure." The materiality of abstract human labor discovered by Marx is presented inverted, in its name, as an attribute that labor acquires postmortem, whose quality eludes any definition beyond the abstract name of abstract.

What Marx observes "emphatically," if by such is meant the repetition made four times in the first chapter of Capital, is the physiological materiality of abstract labor, and consequently its existence in every mode of organization of social production. This leads us to dwell, once again, on the historical specificity of the social being of commodity producers and, consequently, the historical specificity of their consciousness. Whatever the mode of production, each member of society acts as an individual organ of the process of social metabolism. As such, he carries in his person the corresponding individual portion of the total labour-power of society in the material form of his physiological capacity to productively expend his body in the concretely useful way assigned to him by his social relation. That is, he carries in his person the material capacity to perform abstract work under a socially determined concrete form. In modes of production whose organicity is governed by the bonds of personal dependence, the productive members of society are directly assigned, as an attribute inherent to

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[143] Sohn-Rethel, Intellectual Labor and Manual Work, op. cit., p. 30.

[144] Sohn-Rethel, Intellectual Work and Manual Work, op. cit., p. 27; Alfred Sohn Rethel, Geistige und korperliche Arbeit, Weinheim: VCH Verlagsgesellschaft, 1989, p. 12.

their persons a priori of their participation in production, the concrete useful form under which they must apply their individual quotas of social labor power. Very different is the case in the capitalist mode of production, where social labor is organized privately and independently. At the moment when the members of society must take their active part in the process of social production, they are not assigned the concrete useful form which they must give to the expenditure of their capacity to work. They are determined as organs of this process only in so far as they are individual bearers of aliquot portions of the capacity to perform work in general, i.e., to productively expend the physiological materiality of their body in as yet undefined concrete useful forms. As individuals free from personal dependence, they must carry out the definition in question by assigning themselves the concrete form useful to others who have to give to their work privately and independently of the social unit of which they are individual organs and, therefore, of those other recipients of the product of their labor. Consequently, they cannot recognize each other as organs of the unity of the process of social metabolism directly through the immediate recognition of their products as social use-values, and therefore as mere products of the concrete forms they have given to their labors. The unity of the process of social metabolism thus pertains to a double contradiction. In so far as this unity is directly presented as such in the allocation of social labour to each of its individual organs, this allocation does not go beyond the general character of labour as a material expenditure of abstract labour. As soon as the allocation of social labour to each individual organ of its own reaches the concrete socially useful forms of carrying out this material expenditure, the unit in question appears to be negated in itself. By its very nature, it is a contradiction which cannot develop in the form of a direct social relation between persons which expresses, at the same time, the unity of the process of social metabolism and the negation of this unity by the private organization of labour. The synthesis of this unity can only take the form of an indirect social relation automatically mediated by the very materialization of social labor that carries the contradiction. That is, through the determination of the product as a commodity, that is, as a use-value which, because it is the materialization of a certain amount of abstract human labor applied under a socially useful concrete form in a private and independent way, bears the purely social attribute of being able to relate directly to another of the same attribute in exchange. that is, it carries value, thus indirectly relating socially to its producers. Such is the simplest historically specific determination of the social being of commodity producers, and consequently of their consciousness. That is why they are personally free individuals who confront the material product of their conscious and voluntary productive action as the bearer of a social power that is alien to them and to which they are subject in their determination as individual organs of the process of social life.

This simpler determination of human subjectivity specifically proper to the capitalist mode of production is the very object of the first chapter of Capital from its first paragraph. But, in the reversal practiced by Sohn-Rethel, abstract labor, material expenditure of human labor power in general and therefore common to all modes of production, has become a concept devoid of any substance other than its very name, which is attributed to be the historically specific determination of labor proper to the capitalist mode of production. In turn, the private and independent form with which social labor is organized, specifically proper to the mode of production capital, by which abstract labor materialized in its product is socially represented in

a historically specific way as the value of the product, has disappeared from the scene. That is why, even in the face of the explicit evidence of Marx's development of the fetishistic determination of consciousness, even of scientific consciousness, by the social relation objectified in the commodity, Sohn-Rethel cannot recognize that the unfolding of this social relation throughout Capital is, in itself, the unfolding of the consciousness of its subjects as its personifications:

In Capital there are certainly numerous indications about the problem of how the social base determines the intellectual superstructure, and also about the indispensable intellectual powers that are at the basis of the productive process, but the problems of the formation of consciousness do not constitute a primary component of Marx's main work.[145]

How does Sohn-Rethel propose to overcome this shortcoming that he finds in Capital about "the problems of the formation of consciousness"?:

> I am exclusively interested in this formal structure [of commodity exchange], not the relationship between value and work. When we take work into consideration, we enter the field of economics. Our interest is limited to the abstraction contained in exchange and which determines, as we shall see, the conceptual thinking proper to societies based on the production of commodities. ... Seen from this economic point of view, it is true that commodities are exchanged according to the quantity of labour they contain. In our analysis, however, we are not interested in the economy of exchange, but only in exchange as a peculiar form of social interrelation between particular individuals.[146]

According to Sohn-Rethel, by "the relation between the base and the superstructure, in the Marxist sense of the expression" we must again understand the dialectic of the on the one hand ..., on the other hand. ... On the one hand, there is the "field", the "point of view" of the "economy", in which "we are not interested". On the other hand, "our interest is limited to the abstraction contained in the exchange and which determines [...] conceptual thinking, etc." But not only does the unity between the base and the superstructure succumb in this dialectic, but the same thing happens to the unity of the superstructure itself:

> These considerations, related to the economy of exchange, have already been dealt with by Marx in his critique of political economy, and they do not affect our study at all, nor do the forms of consciousness that make up the economic life of society or those mental forms grouped under the name of "ideologies." This is of no interest to the present study...[147]

On the one hand, there are the "ideological" superstructures, on the other the "intellectual superstructure," where the "cognitive faculties of civilized man" reside in their pure abstraction, the determination of the former being so irrelevant to the determination of the latter

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[145] Sohn-Rethel, Intellectual Labor and Manual Work, op. cit., p. 12.
[146] Ibid, pp. 31-51.
[147] Sohn-Rethel, Intellectual Labor and Manual Work, op. cit., p. 40.

that they "have no interest" in the process of knowing the latter:

> Well, I propose to show that the abstraction that takes place in exchange and that is reflected in value, finds an expression identical to it in the abstract intellect, also called "pure understanding," which is the conceptual source of scientific knowledge. To show that this is the true historical explanation of the enigmatic "cognitive faculties" of civilized man, we must carry out an analysis of the formal characteristics of commodity exchange, which is methodologically independent of any consideration of the magnitude of value and the function of human labor embodied in them.[148]

Let us dwell, then, on the postulate "abstraction that operates in exchange" and its relation to the determinations of the consciousness of the "civilized man."

The intellect is the human capacity to consciously and voluntarily govern one's own action, recognizing itself as an individual organ of the process of social metabolism. In its historical development, the exercise of the intellect takes on the concrete forms that carry the social relationship specifically inherent in the prevailing way of organizing social production and consumption. The simplest historically specific determination of the capitalist mode of production is the private organization of social labor. In turn, in its simplest form, this organization implies that the producer has full control over his individual labor, but lacks any control over the social character of it. That is why his capacity to govern his action as an individual organ of the process of social metabolism confronts him, at the very moment in which he assigns his individual capacity to perform socially useful work under a definite concrete form, as a power objectified in the product of this labor. Its material process of production is itself the process in which it produces its general social relation. He knows that, whatever material form he gives to the former, what he must produce is value; that is, the attribute that makes that material product an object that can be exchanged for an equivalent one. Because of this need to be governed in his material productive action by the production of this objectified social attribute, the consciousness and will of the commodity producer carries as its simplest specific determination a contradictory necessity: in order to enhance his capacity to produce the objectified social relation that confronts him as a social power that is alien to him and dominates him, he needs to enhance his objective capacity to govern his individual work. That is, his need to reproduce his alienation as an organ of the process of social metabolism autonomously governed by the production of value forces him to organize his individual work with the freedom proper to objective knowledge of the determinations that operate in that work. This contradiction develops by giving the exercise of consciousness of commodity producers a form that is historically specific to them. It is a consciousness that needs to stop its capacity for analysis in the face of the form that every concrete presents to it, which it qualitatively distinguishes, in order to represent it as lacking any power to realize and, therefore, empty of any content other than its appearance. Once this reduction has been practiced, consciousness represents to itself the objective relation existing between these concretes in a correspondingly external way, by means of the measure of the quantitative

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[148] Ibid, p. 40.

proportions with which they are presented to it. It is an objective consciousness whose very form is the negation of objectivity with respect to the fact that its own determination as free encloses its alienation in the objectified social relation. It is, therefore, a question of a specific historical form of objective consciousness whose ideological character is not given by having this or that content, but by its very form, that is, by its very method.[149] And it is with this consciousness that commodity producers set in motion each cycle of their process of social metabolism by organizing their work of producing social use-values in the concrete form of the production of "physically metaphysical" objects.

The private allocation of social labour takes place in production. Commodities emerge from it as materializations of quantities of abstract socially necessary labor, and therefore, with the social attribute of being values. When abstract labour has been privately applied in a socially useless concrete form, its product emerges from production in a material form devoid of the social attribute of changeability, devoid of value. But, because of the private way in which social labour is carried out, the fact of having or not having value cannot be brought to light in the process of production itself. This quality is only manifested a posteriori, in its exercise in circulation, where the entry of the commodity in an exchange relation with an equivalent one reveals the existence of the attribute that both have acquired in production as value-bearing use-values.

Let us now retrace the path that commodities formally follow in the process of exchange. Commodities leave the production process where social labor is organized privately, to enter circulation. But, as Marx remarks, commodities are inanimate objects incapable of going on their own to the market, and even if they could resist doing so, their owners would impose their will on them and force them to present themselves on it:

> Commodities cannot come to the market by themselves, nor can they exchange themselves. We must, therefore, turn our eyes to their guardians, to the owners of commodities. Commodities are things, and are therefore defenseless in the face of man. If they are not willingly submitted, man can use force or, in other words, seize it.[150]

Of course, however powerful the will of the commodity owners may appear to be in the process of circulation, it is a will already determined by the private realization of social labor in the process of production. It is therefore a question of a will that presents itself to exchange already determined in a concrete way as the personification of the commodity:

> In order that these things may relate to each other as commodities, it is necessary that their guardians should relate to each other as persons whose wills dwell in those objects, so that each possessor of a commodity can only take possession of another's commodity by the latter's will and by parting with his own; that is, by means of an act of will common to both. ... The content of this legal relationship or of will is given by the

[149] I refer again to my book: Iñigo Carrera, Capital: Historical Reason, Revolutionary Subject and Consciousness, op. cit.

[150] Marx, Capital, op. cit., vol. I, p. 48.

> economic relationship itself. Here, people only exist for each other as representatives of their goods, [...] In the course of our investigation, we have to constantly see that the economic roles played by men are nothing more than so many personifications of the economic relations on behalf of which they are confronted with each other.[151]

The exchange relation is not an abstract relation between inanimate things, however much it has as its content that they contain the social attribute of being value. It is a social relation between persons which takes the inverted form of a relation between things which, in turn, necessarily takes the concrete form of a relation between wills alienated as personifications of commodities. In turn, these personifications operate as individual organs of the indirect unity of the process of social metabolism, under the immediate appearance of being an established relationship between free persons abstractly devoid of social being.

It is against this simpler and more general determination of the historically specific consciousness proper to the capitalist mode of production that Marx has brought to light the "abstraction that operates in exchange" constructed by Sohn-Rethel by dint of dismembering the unity of this determination into parts of parts. Sohn Rethel begins by conceiving of exchange as the "equalizing fact" of commodities: "they are equalized by the fact that they are exchanged; they are not exchanged for the fact of possessing equality." That is, for Sohn-Rethel, commodities enter exchange without value, that is, devoid of any common qualitative attribute that determines them as exchangeable objects, and that is expressed in their quantitative equality in exchange. From this it follows that the labor of the producers of commodities does not generate the specific social attribute of these commodities as values, so that neither does their consciousness have a way of being determined, from the process of production, as an alienated consciousness. In the externality of circulation, if commodities are not recognized as bearers of a common quality arising from production, any determination of their changeability seems to be reduced to the accidental will of the changeling. And since changelings present themselves in circulation in their condition as private possessors of commodities, the appearance is generated that their will is specifically determined as abstractly free by nature:

> There is nothing in the formal constitution of exchange that can predetermine its quantitative relation. A man who was dying of thirst in the desert would "exchange" all his property for a single glass of water.[152]

Behind these appearances, it is concealed that, in reality, the individual will of the changelings is determined as an organ of the indirect unity of the process of social metabolism. It is forgotten that if, if only for an apparent caprice of the changelings, the proportions of change were to depart from those corresponding to the unity of the reproduction of the process of social metabolism, the indirect automatism of the private organization of social labor would be set in motion. And if any changer insisted on not listening to the messages that reach him via this movement, he would see his capacity to dispose of the objectified social relationship

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[151] Ibid, vol. I, p. 48.

[152] Sohn-Rethel, Intellectual Labor and Manual Work, op. cit., p. 51.

deteriorate, and from there, to reproduce his life. For Sohn-Rethel, to account for the "formal constitution of exchange" does not mean to ask about the determinations of form; it means to stop before the appearance of it. That is why he cannot help but give as proof of his argument a Robinson typical of neoclassical economics.

In this way, Sohn-Rethel has emptied, on the one hand, commodities of a common qualitative attribute that gives reason to the fact that they are exchanged in the quantitative proportions corresponding to the indirect realization of the unity of the process of social metabolism; on the other hand, it has emptied the will of the changelings of its determination as the personification of commodities. On this basis, Sohn-Rethel summarizes his conception:

> ... The essence of commodity-abstraction lies in the fact that it is not a product of thought, which does not have its origin in the thought of men, but in their acts. ... The economic concept of value that derives from it is characterized by an absolute absence of quality, by a purely quantitative differentiation and by its applicability to all kinds of goods and services that can be exhibited in a market [...] the economic concept of value is a real abstraction.[153]

Sohn-Rethel starts by affirming that the "abstraction-commodity" is a phenomenon of real existence that occurs in the act of exchange, where quantities of ... any quality that gives basis to these quantitative relations. To suppose the possibility of the existence of the concrete process of change as proper to a purely quantitative determination devoid of any quality is really an abstraction that can only spring from the thought of the one who supposes it. By the way, the study of quantitative determination itself, mathematics, requires by the very nature of its object, to make such an abstraction.[154] But this can never be an abstraction of real existence. And it cannot be so because, in its determination as the form of matter, quantity is a concrete form of quality; it is the determination of the quality in which it is affirmed in its magnitude. Hence the claim that in reality there is a quantity which is not an attribute of a certain quality can only result from reasoning based on the purest externality attained by dint of ideally mutilating the concrete form in question.[155]

Sohn-Rethel's discourse then slips from the real world to the conceptual world. And now it turns out that quantity without quality is what characterizes the "economic concept of value," derived from the "commodity abstraction." A concept is an intellectual representation based on abstracting the qualities that are recognized as essential of a certain real form. A concept whose quality cannot be enunciated because it lacks it, is no concept at all. It is not even the name of a generic attribute represented as an abstract universal. It is a set of words that

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[153] Sohn-Rethel, Intellectual Work and Manual Work, op. cit., pp. 27-28.

[154] Iñigo Carrera, Capital: Historical Reason, Revolutionary Subject and Consciousness, op. cit., chap. 8.

[155] Hegel's following observation is directly relevant:

> ... In everything that progresses from conditioned to conditioned, either no unconditioned can be pointed out, or, if one can be similar, then it is a question of the formal indifference that has outside of itself the conditioned different, essence without form, [...] quantity without internal quality or infinity, rest without movement (Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, On the Ways of Treating Natural Law Scientifically, Madrid: Aguilar, 1979, p. 47).

lacks both meaning and logical consistency. Something of which, as we have already seen, Sohn-Rethel himself boasts: "The term [value], by itself, as with value in exchange, has no conceptual content of its own, no definable logical substance." So free from quality is this concept of value that it can abandon its ideal existence inherent in every concept in order to have a real existence: "the economic concept of value is a real abstraction." Pure idealism, despite Sohn-Rethel's protests about his materialist vocation, as it could not be otherwise having assumed the existence of a real form devoid of quality. Entangled in his own construction, Sohn-Rethel tries to save it from the idealistic absurdity:

> ... The economic concept of value is a real abstraction. It exists only in human thought but does not spring from it. Its nature is rather social and its origin must be sought in the spatiotemporal mat of human relations. It is not men who produce these abstractions, but their actions.[156]

Sohn-Rethel presents as singularity what, apart from idealistic inversions, is obvious to the universe of concepts, namely, that they exist only in human thought and that they "do not spring" abstractly from it, but that "their origin must be sought in the spatiotemporal sphere of human relations." It happens that he has taken his method of dismembering concrete forms so far that now, on the one hand, there are "men" and, on the other, "their actions". And, indeed, for Sohn-Rethel, change is an action so abstract that it does not involve "men", that is, human subjects with consciousness and will determined by their social being. Even the doubt that tormented Dr. Faust ends up being split by Sohn-Rethel:

> The only thing that is abstract is the action of exchange. The consciousness and action of those who participate in the exchange split and go their own way.[157]

The Sohn-Rethel abstraction of change is so abstract that it even abstracts from the action of consciousness and, therefore, of the will, of the changers as the way in which they govern their action of change. On the one hand, the human action of exchange is governed by an automatism that in its abstraction excludes the intervention of consciousness, on the other, there is a human consciousness that remains on the sidelines while the very action that is governing takes place. It is not a matter of a consciousness that governs action by stopping at an apparent determination. It is a consciousness abstracted from its own determination, that is, from its own quality.

The question goes back to square one. It is not, as Sohn Rethel believes, that commodities enter into circulation without embodying a common quality which is expressed in their equalization in exchange, and that it is in itself the very act of exchanging them that equalizes them. On the contrary, commodities enter circulation bearing the social attribute of value, and their owners do so with their consciousness specifically determined by the private realization of social labor in the process of production, that is, as personifications of their

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[156] Sohn-Rethel, Intellectual Work and Manual Work, op. cit., p. 28.
[157] Sohn-Rethel, Intellectual Work and Manual Work, op. cit., p. 33.

commodities. And it is in this condition that they are confronted with their own material product as the bearer of a social power that is alien to them and dominates them. It is the ability to relate them socially as individual organs deprived of and independent of the indirect unit of the process of social metabolism. Hence their consciousness as changeling—and not the process of exchange—carries with it the practical necessity of being indifferent, i.e., of abstracting from the fact that commodities possess a common quality whose quantitative equality is expressed in exchange, and proceeding to compare quantities of qualitatively different use-values as if they had the natural attribute of being exchanged in certain proportions:

> What is of practical interest to those who exchange some products for others is to know how many other people's products they will get for their own, that is, in what proportions they will exchange some products for others. As soon as these proportions acquire, by force of habit, a certain fixity, it seems as if they spring from the very nature inherent in the products of labor [...] In reality, the value-character of the products of labour is only consolidated by functioning as magnitudes of value. These are constantly changing, without the will, prior knowledge or actions of the people among whom the change is made. Their own social movement takes the form of a movement of things under their control, rather than being controlled by them. And it is necessary that the production of commodities be developed in its entirety, so that from one's own experience arises the scientific consciousness that private labor that is carried out independently of each other, although it maintains a relationship of mutual interdependence among itself and in all its aspects, as elementary links that are in the social division of labor, they can be constantly reduced to their degree of social proportion, because in the fortuitous and incessantly oscillating proportions of exchange of their products, the socially necessary labour-time for their production is always imposed as a regulating natural law.[158]

But for Sohn-Rethel, the "action of exchange" is a human action that is carried out without the intervention of consciousness. Moreover, if the latter intervened, the former could not even exist:

> It could be said that actors do not realize the abstraction of their actions because their own conscience prevents them from doing so. If abstraction came into their minds, their action would cease to be an exchange and abstraction would not take place. In reality, the abstraction of exchange does come to their minds, but only when the transaction has been completely consummated and they are faced with the circulation of commodities. The main consequence of this is the concretization of abstraction in the separate form of money.[159]

> It is one thing to show that human beings govern their action of exchange with a

[158] Marx, Capital, op. cit., vol. I, p. 40.
[159] Sohn-Rethel, Intellectual Labor and Manual Work, op. cit., pp. 33-34.

practical consciousness that needs to stop at the appearance that makes them see in the commodity a fetish that has the power to dominate it. It is quite another to affirm that exchange is a human action that not only takes place without consciousness governing it, but that has as its condition of existence the absence of consciousness in its realization. The "they don't know it, but they do it" does not mean that the practical consciousness of the commodity owners is blank at the moment of action and that it has now arisen because they have acted. It means that her social being determines her consciousness in a way that makes it not necessary to go beyond appearance, and to wonder about the content contained in it. But, for Sohn-Rethel, the "action of exchange" is so abstract that it is a human act devoid of the proper attribute of human subjectivity:

> But the essence of the postulate of equality in exchange lies precisely in the fact that it makes the abyss of experience that separates the owners who carry out an exchange disappear. The postulate of equality in exchange does not come at all from his experience.[160]

The act of exchange has as its condition that the changers in train in it governing their action with a consciousness capable of abstracting the difference between the use values involved, in order to see them as equivalent. But, according to Sohn-Rethel, this consciousness can only arise as a consequence of the exchange having been consummated. That is, in reality, the realization of change presupposes a consciousness that governs it; in the Sohn-Rethel inversion, the existence of such awareness presupposes that the change has already been made. Hence he cannot explain the concrete form that consciousness has at the moment when it enters the exchange and operates in it, that is, in the transaction itself, and he must jump in his approach to the moment "when the transaction has already been completely consummated." What it does is to put consciousness itself, and therefore the human subject, out of the act of change.

The attribution of reality to a quantity of no quality; a concept lacking conceptual quality; a conscious human action that has as its condition that consciousness is absent from it. Three abstractions whose only reality is that of being the product of an abstract thought that seeks to determine the social relation objectified in circulation, where it manifests itself inverted, and not in production, where it is born. It is on the basis of these three unreal abstractions that Sohn-Rethel claims to found "the true historical explanation of the enigmatic 'cognitive faculties' of civilized man." Given our present objective, the analysis of the resulting inversions is left for another opportunity.

10.2.10 Reuten (The Marxism of the Value Form)

Through the mouth of Reuten, this Marxism sets out to rescue Marx from the "ambiguities"[161] into which it accuses him of having fallen by inappropriately using the method

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[160] Sohn-Rethel, Intellectual Labor and Manual Work, op. cit., p. 51.

[161] Geert Reuten, 'Value as Social Form', in Value, Social Form and the State, ed. by Michael Williams, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988, p. 42, own translation.

based on starting from a "universal abstract notion" and then "articulating its splitting" into "opposing concepts",[162] which he considers key to conceiving "real abstraction", "abstraction in practice":[163]

> ... Marx's theory of value is ambiguous in two respects. First, while clearly intended to distance itself from the Ricardian theory of labor embodied in the writings on value, much of the theory in the three volumes of Capital appears to be a throwback to this concept. The second ambiguity [...] concerns the way in which Marx derives the concepts of exchange value and abstract labour [...] At the point where it does, the reference is not to capitalism, but rather to the (commodity) exchange of commodities in general. But since abstract labour is "labour opposed to capital" as wage labour, the concept of capitalism cannot be separated from the concept of value.[164]

Undoubtedly, the best example of real abstraction is offered by Reuten himself, who begins by abstracting from the already seen explicit statement made by Marx that: "... I do not start from 'concepts', and therefore not from the 'concept of value', which is why I do not have to 'divide' this 'concept' in any way, etc."

Rubin's inversions are revived in Marxism "of the value form," accompanied by touches of those of Sohn-Rethel. But here the aim of naturalizing free consciousness, and of presenting it as opposed to its true source in commodity production, becomes immediately transparent. I have developed the critique of this conception in the work already cited on Rubin, so that here I focus on the question of its naturalization of free consciousness.

On the basis of the splitting of concepts, Reuten follows Rubin in the conception of abstract labor as something that exists only in an ideal way in production, and that only acquires real existence in exchange thanks to the fact that use-values are there found with the money that validates them. In the real world, the fact that social labor is performed privately and independently makes the unity of the process of social metabolism take concrete form through the representation of the simple expenditure of human labor power embodied in social use-values, as the capacity of these to relate to each other in exchange. That is, it makes the abstract labour materialised in its products represent itself as the value of these, i.e., that the products of labour take the form of values, which are socially represented as commodities. By its determination as privately performed social labour, the value of commodities is necessarily expressed as exchange-value; that is, the value of one commodity is expressed relatively in quantities of the use value of another, which acts as its equivalent. The exchange relation is the necessary concrete form of expression of the value of commodities, that is, it is the form of value that the products of social labor carried out privately and independently have. Money is nothing more than the developed expression of the form of value, under which it has reached a concrete substantive form that transcends, in appearance, its character as an exchange relation. The market is the general unit of exchange relations, through which the indirect unity of social

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[162] Ibid, p. 52, own translation

[163] Ibid, p. 45, own translation.

[164] Ibid, p. 42, own translation.

production and consumption is realized.

In the real world, the content determines its concrete forms necessary to be realized. But what happens in Reuten's conceptual world?

> The necessary interaction of the exchange relation and the value form of labour power and its products is really constituted in the market. In the market, labor power and particular useful objects are recognized only under the dimension of value in terms of money. In the exchange in the market, heterogeneous entities are commensurated and transformed as such into money. ... In the exchange in the market, both the particular quality and the quantity (time) of the labour which has produced the useful object are abstracted. This particular labor time is considered only in terms of its ability to create value in the form of money, and money, in purchasing this particular labor, actually measures it. In this sense, particular labor really takes the form of abstract labor: universal abstract labor. Thus, the necessary interaction of the exchange relation and the form of value in the market actually constitutes the useful object as an entity of double form, i.e., use-value and money. This duplication constitutes the useful object as a commodity. Alongside it, labor is constituted as an entity of double form, that is, labor as the producer of particular use-values, or particular concrete labor; and labor as a producer of value, or universal abstract labor.[165]

In Reuten's conceptual world, too, the dialectic of "on the one hand" and "on the other hand" prevails. Exchange value, which is the same as saying the form of value or the exchange relation, is divided into its two synonyms, converted into mutually independent entities. On the one hand, there is the "exchange relation", on the other, the "value form". The market is not the general unit of relations of exchange, but a given space to which the "exchange relation" converges, on the one hand, the "form of value" on the other, to enter, from their reciprocal independence, into "interaction". On the one hand, the "exchange relation" brings to the market "heterogeneous entities" that have no common substance that is expressed in it. On the other hand, the "form of value" is the natural attribute of "money" to make "heterogeneous entities" "commensurable" as soon as they are brought into purely external contact with it - and there is no possibility of a contact that is not external, since there is no substance in common between heterogeneous entities and Reuten's money. The fetishism of money then reaches the point of not only "constituting" labor (which, in reality, no longer has its existence at this point) in the abstract, in the best style of Rubin, but of "constituting" the "useful object as a commodity." According to Reuten, it is not the determination of use-values as materializations of socially necessary abstract labor performed privately and independently - materialization that can only occur in the process of production itself - the content that makes them commodities, exchangeable objects, that gives them the form of value, and that, therefore, determines the existence of exchange. On the contrary, for Reuten, it is the very immediate appearance of exchange for money that determines, by itself, use-values as commodities and "constitutes" labor as abstract.

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[165] Reuten, 'Value as Social Form', op. cit., p. 52.

The disciple surpasses the master in exposing the inversion inherent in this construction. It even adds an additional inversion to it. According to Reuten, in its conceptual existence, abstract labour is "'labour opposed to capital' as wage labour", so that the enunciation of the concept of value presupposes the enunciation of the concept of capital. How does Reuten enunciate the concept of capital, that is, of value that is valorized, if he has not been able to enunciate the concept of value before? Let us recall Marx's observation already quoted:

> [I]n the analysis of the commodity [...] there is no need to immediately splice definitions of "capital," which must necessarily be a contradiction as long as we confine ourselves to analyzing the elements of the commodity.[166]

The ideological need to deny the materiality of abstract labor is such that Reuten cannot even stop at the incoherence of manifestly circular reasoning. Unlike Hegel, he believes that science can be put before science.

Let us note two issues. In the first place, in his attempts to erase the materiality of abstract labour and to make it appear as something that has its present existence in exchange, that is, when labour no longer exists as such but is materialised in its product and it is this product that enters into exchange, Reuten ends by stating that money "buys labour". In the second place, Reuten cannot escape the fetishism of money even by belatedly resorting to the development of determinations of "value in the form of money." This path is already closed from the outset by the assertion that labor is "constituted" in the abstract in terms of its "ability to create value in the form of money." One of two things: either "value in the form of money" is a naturally inherent attribute of money, or it is "abstract labor," constituted as such by its "ability to create value in the form of money." Behind its bombastic language, Marxism "of the form of value" can only move in the infamous terrain that goes from money fetishism to circular reasoning.

Like Rubin, the time has now come for Reuten to force the appearances arising from circulation within the sphere of production. Again, the materiality of abstract labor as a process of simple productive expenditure of the human body in action is erased, putting in its place the abstractly ideal determination by consciousness that produces "with a view" to selling for money:

> Production is production for exchange, and useful objects are produced as commodities: that is, with a view to being sold for money. Before the real change this is an anticipation. However, the commodities produced certainly represent ideally a sum of value, ideal money. In this sense, the real abstraction in the market is anticipated by an ideal abstraction and the real commensuration in the market is anticipated by an *ideal pre-commensuration*. The labour process is then ideally dominated in terms of ideal value, and the concrete activity of labour becomes the ideal form of value; Work certainly ideally takes the form of abstract work.[167]

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[166] Marx, Marginal Notes to Adolph Wagner's "Treatise on Political Economy," op. cit., p. 51.
[167] Reuten, 'Value as Social Form', op. cit., p. 54.

The reversal of the materiality of abstract labour into a merely ideal existence, i.e., into a state of consciousness, finally enables Reuten to conceive of the determination of the social being of the commodity producer as a "force" which imposes itself "externally" on his being in the "private sphere":

> The external driving force of production, which together with exchange gives rise to the form of value [...], thus becomes ideally internalized. With this internalization, the contradiction that the social form (value) is the external determinant of private production is transcended: this particular private sphere (bourgeois production) transcends into the sphere of the economy, which is a public sphere determined by the form of value.[168]

This conception only repeats, only in the pedantic tone of scientific varnish, what vulgar consciousness already makes the commodity producer believe about the determination of his social being, namely, that this is imposed on him externally over his condition as a private individual. And that, being external to his social being, this condition of private individual, and therefore free from all personal subjection, can only be a natural attribute of his. An appearance that Reuten hastens to emphasize: if in the sphere of production, natural freedom has had to yield to the external pressure of the "form of value," there certainly remain other "private spheres" where it reigns at ease:

> Labor power is created in the private sphere of the home and is not produced with a view to being sold.[169]

Williams, another Marxist "of the value form," is concerned with reinforcing this Concepción:

> The private subject takes part in the search for personal, interactive, cooperative, altruistic and multidimensional relationships in the private sphere. He is guided by the attempt to reproduce himself materially as a unitary person; to overcome the experienced antinomy between communality in the alienated form of politics and the association of civil society determined by the form of value.[170]

So natural does human freedom seem to Reuten and Williams, that they deny it where it springs from its specific historical determination, commodity production, in order to maintain that it exists only ... where direct relationships of personal dependence prevail.

Moreover, without any more scope at this point than that of a simple observation, the contrast between what the "Marxism of the value-form" sees in the "private sphere of the home"

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[168] Ibid, p. 54, own translation.

[169] Ibid, pp. 51-60.

[170] Michael Williams, "Competition Subjects, State and Civil Society," in Value, Social Form and the State, ed. by Michael Williams, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988, p. 109.

and the conclusion reached by Marx regarding the production of labor power in it is remarkable:

> The individual consumption of the worker is thus a factor in the production and reproduction of capital, whether it takes place [...] within or outside the labour process [...] It does not matter that the worker carries out his individual consumption for his own benefit and not for the sake of the capitalist. In fact, the individual consumption of the worker is unproductive for himself, since it only reproduces the necessary individual; it is productive only for the capitalist and for the state, since it produces the productive force of wealth for others. From the social point of view, therefore, the working class, even outside the direct labour process, is an attribute of capital, no more and no less than inanimate instruments. Even its individual consumption is, within certain limits, a mere factor in the process of reproduction of capital.[171]

10.2.11 De Angelis (*Autonomist Marxism*)

Autonomist Marxism starts from Rubin's idealist inversion, to return to the very conception of abstract labor as a historically specific attribute of commodity production. Take, for example, De Angelis. By advancing analytically in search of the common substance that is expressed in the attribute of the exchangeability of commodities, Marx leaves behind the material qualities that make them different use-values, and with them the material peculiarities of the labor that produces these different use-values. Abstracting the material diversity of concrete labour, he discovers abstract labour as the "expenditure of human labour power carried out regardless of the form of its expenditure".[172] By abstracting the specific materiality, the generic materiality of human labor has been laid bare. As such, it is a materiality common to any form of social labor organization. But De Angelis jumps out of the analytic process that was confronted with real determinations, and replaces the discovery of the materiality of abstract labor with a "definition" of abstract labor. Instead of advancing in the analysis of abstract labor in order to discover its specific form of social representation in the capitalist mode of production, its representation as the value of commodities, De Angelis considers the question resolved in advance, and starts by defining abstract labor itself as the specific attribute of labor in the capitalist mode of production. As usual, he attributes his approach to Marx:

> What then, for Marx, are the characteristics of capitalist labor, of abstract labor?[173]

With no other foundation than the apparent invocation of Marx, De Angelis has turned abstract labour into a historically specific form of human labour and, therefore, into its opposite, into a definite concrete form of labour. On this inverted basis, De Angelis intends to create the

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[171] Marx, Capital, op. cit., vol. I, pp. 481-482.

[172] To follow literally the terms of the English translation used by De Angelis: "human labour power expended without regard to the form of its expenditure".

[173] Massimo De Angelis, 'Beyond the Technological and the Social Paradigms: A Political Reading of Abstract Labour as the Substance of Value', in Capital and Class, no. 57 (1995), p. 110.

appearance that, far from having mutilated the generic character of abstract work, what he is doing is extending it. The "regardless of the concrete material form", which determines the materiality of abstract labour, is extended to an "regardless of" the worker's "life experience":

> Marx defines abstract labor as "the expenditure of human labor power performed regardless of the form of its expenditure" (..., emphasis added). This definition is central. ... This means, obviously, abstracting from the concrete determinations of useful labour which constitute its useful properties [...]. But it means more, much more, than this. Abstracting from the determinations of useful labor also necessarily means [...] abstracting from the life experience of the workers.[174]

It could be thought that De Angelis refers here to the abstraction of the concrete forms that consciousness and the will to perform this or that concrete work takes, to the abstraction of the "life experience" of the worker as a cook or shoemaker, leaving from them their materiality as a simple expenditure of the human body in the process of thought that organizes work. But no, De Angelis makes it clear that his work abstracted from "life experience" is not devoid of all concrete qualities, but that this abstraction fills him with them:

> For example, [...] abstract labour means 'the expenditure of labour power carried out regardless' to the pain, suffering, human brutalization, boredom, stupidity, etc. that work may entail [...] Moreover, abstracting from life experience means that workers are placed in a position of indifference to the final product they are producing and what and why they are making. In other words, the sensible experience of work is restricted to the experience of exhaustion and emptiness of meaning.[175]

In De Angelis's argument, the "no matter" of the process of abstraction, which leads to the discovery of the materiality of abstract labor as the simple expenditure of the human body, has experienced a remarkable leap of subject. At the beginning, I referred to the very way in which the analysis proceeds. And, in this sense, it should be concluded, following the argument of De Angelis, that the condition of abstract labor by the abstraction of the worker's "life experience" also applies to the expenditure of labor power regardless of the pleasure, joy, human fulfillment, entertainment, liveliness, etc., that work may imply, done with interest with respect to the final product and what and why it is being done. But the closing of the cited paragraph already shows that the "no matter" has ceased to refer to the proceeding of the analysis, to become the qualitative attribute of a particular modality with which the worker applies his conscience and will when performing his work. It has become the quality of a specific concrete way of doing human work. The overcoming by the analysis of qualitative specificity, which exposes the real materiality of abstract labor, has been used as a device to construct a definition of abstract labor, which makes it appear as the specifically capitalist quality of labor. Another beautiful example of what intertwining concepts can do!

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[174] Ibid, p. 110, own translation.

[175] Ibid, pp. 110-111, own translation.

In this way, De Angelis vanishes the materiality of real abstract labour, replacing it with a concept constructed from the immediate concrete forms presented by the consciousness and will of the worker in the capitalist mode of production. On the basis of which he conceives of the overcoming of capitalist determinations of labour, and therefore of the supersession of the capitalist mode of production itself, as if it were entirely independent of the transformation of the materiality of labour and sprang, on the contrary, from a "vital experience" engendered outside the labour process itself:

> If abstract labour abstracts from this vital experience of the workers, there is nothing in this activity as such which contributes to overcoming all these inhuman characteristics of labour.[176]

By means of the same concept, De Angelis erases the private and independent form with which social labour is carried out as the historically specific determination of social labour in the capitalist mode of production, and from which results the peculiar role played by abstract labour in it. By erasing the private character of labor, it has erased the historical specificity of free consciousness, and its necessary determination as a concrete form of consciousness alienated in the commodity. The alienation of the general social relation as an attribute of the product of social labour, a historically specific way of organising social labour in a private and independent way, and which determines the experience of the worker in his practical life, is theoretically inverted as an abstract imposition on a supposed "life experience" which is conceived to be born outside the labour process:

> ... Since abstract labour has been abstracted from the vital experience of the workers, it must present itself as something alien, as a power external to the workers themselves. Abstract labor is, therefore, alienated labor.[177]

But what is the source of this "life experience" of the worker, proscribed by De Angelis from the labor process, that is, from the place where properly human life activity occurs? The answer is simple: human nature; abstracted, if we are to assume coherence in construction, from any determination for work. And what human nature is it about? Once again, it is a question of the "natural" human freedom which, as such, resists any attempt to be subjected by powers outside it:

> In the first place, the human labor power expended regardless of the form of its expenditure immediately defines a power relationship between classes, because, as discussed above, the alienated character of labor can only be the result of an imposition. However, where there is imposition there is resistance. Just as the concept of death necessarily presupposes the concept of life, the alienated and imposed character of

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[176] De Angelis, "Beyond the Technological and the Social Paradigms: A Political Reading of Abstract Labour as the Substance of Value", op. cit., p. 110.
[177] Ibid, p. 111, own translation.

> abstract labor as the source of value presupposes the activity of the working class aimed at escaping and transcending capitalist confinement.[178]

De Angelis has turned human freedom into such an abstractly natural determination that it seems to him that an analogy with the naturalness of life and death is all he needs to give a scientific account of it. The indissoluble unity between idealistic inversion and naturalization has reached its finished expression: the reality of resistance is presented as founded on the concepts of life and death, not on real life and death. But there is more. Just as it is accepted that resistance to oppression has no more determination than human nature itself, it should be accepted that the exercise of oppression has exactly the same natural necessity. Moreover, to affirm that death presupposes life is nothing more than a truism, since the former is, by definition, the result of the latter. But to assert that exploitation "presupposes" resistance is to assert either that resistance pre-exists oppression and therefore its own necessity, since without oppression there is nothing to resist, or that oppression is what gives birth to resistance, and therefore oppression has a deeper root in human nature than resistance.

Let us compare the path followed by us with that taken by De Angelis. In order to answer ourselves scientifically about the form of our political action, we find that we must first account for its antagonistic content of class struggle. When we wanted to answer ourselves about this content, we found that, first, we had to account for the content of the class struggle as an expression of wage labor. In order to account for wage labour, we had to know the determination of labour power as a commodity, and in order to discover the specificity of the commodity, we had to penetrate into the materiality of the labour that produces it. And it was only when we discovered its materiality as abstract labor that we were able to begin to show how the specificity of the realization of social labor in a private and independent way makes the materiality of abstract labor be represented as a social attribute of the material product of human labor, as the value of the commodity. It was this discovery that enabled us to advance to the point of exposing the free consciousness of the commodity producer as the concrete form of his alienated consciousness. So we are faced with the evidence that the consciousness of the producer of commodities is reproduced in his alienation without anyone needing to impose anything on anyone personally, without any personal figure other than that of the producer himself.

In other words, it is not necessary to go so far as to confront the form of wage-labour with which social labour is concretely carried out in the capitalist mode of production, in order to discover the alienated character of this labour. The realm, certainly abstract, of the fullness of the individual freedom of the commodity-producer, i.e., the realm of liberty which has at its base private property founded on one's own labour, is already the realm of the full alienation of the powers of human labour as an attribute of the social powers of its product. Moreover, it is there that the character of alienation is immediately shown in its purity, since it is not veiled by the presence of any human figure that could make it appear as a personal attribute of his. It is only on the basis of this discovery that we can advance in the knowledge of the determinations of the consciousness and will of the wage-worker and the expression of these determinations in

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[178] Ibid, pp. 116-117, own translation.

the concrete form of the class struggle.

On the contrary, those who start by abstracting freedom from its determination as a concrete form of alienation in the commodity—whether by reducing the form of value to its content, or by reducing the content of value to the appearance of its form—can then rely on the appearance created by the presence of the capitalist person to present alienation as a relationship between abstractly free people. Thus, they succeed in making the action of the direct producer, the action of the wage-worker, seem to have no need other than that determined by his abstract natural freedom in the face of an external oppression which, a *contrario sensu*, appears as the unnatural negation of human freedom.

De Angelis exhibits these inversions in all their crudeness. Instead of discovering the concrete forms that the consciousness and will of the working class takes on the basis of discovering the materialized form that the general social relation assumes in the capitalist mode of production, it tries to explain this social relation by the concrete forms presented by the exercise of the consciousness and will of the wage-worker. Instead of starting from the determinations of the commodity in order to discover the determinations of labour power as a commodity, it pretends to start from the concrete forms taken by the determination of labour power as a commodity in order to explain what a commodity is. Instead of starting from the materiality of abstract labor to discover the specific need for its representation as value, he starts from the representation of abstract labor as value to explain what abstract labor is.

Undoubtedly, De Angelis is another convinced that scientific knowledge consists of putting science before science. But here, as in everything, this inversion fulfills a specific ideological role. Under the guise of being based on a rigorously scientific development, De Angelis concludes that the natural freedom of the worker has as its full expression the following:

> To the extent that the autonomy of the working class in its struggle within and against capital is also beyond capital, to the extent that the working class is capable of developing patterns of self-valorization, its struggles also go beyond the law of value.[179]

"Self-valorization of the working class," such is the key that De Angelis has received from Negri.[180] In the realm of charlatans selling "self-help" books, self-valorization can mean anything you want. In the field of the production of value, of valorization, the term "self-valorization of the working class" can only have an unequivocal meaning. It is no longer a question of producing value consisting in producing the attribute of the thing with which the general social relation is presented when labor is performed privately and independently. Now, the one who has to start by producing himself as a value is the worker. This means that the worker has to produce himself as the materialization of socially necessary abstract labor performed privately and independently, so that this labor is represented as the changeability of his own body. As we shall see later, this is exactly what happens to the worker in the capitalist

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[179] De Angelis, "Beyond the Technological and the Social Paradigms: A Political Reading of Abstract Labour as the Substance of Value", op. cit., p. 119.

[180] Antonio Negri, Marx *Au-dela* de Marx, Paris: Christian Bourgois Éditeur, 1979, p. 182.

mode of production, namely, the production of labour power as a commodity. The "self-valorization of the working class" is nothing more than a sycophant's phrase, which while denouncing on the one hand the fetishism of the commodity, smuggling it on the other as the quintessence of human freedom.

10.2.12 Heinrich (The New Reading of Marx)

According to Heinrich:

> *Every act of labor whose product (which can also be a service) is exchanged, produces value*.[181]

This statement, which at first glance may seem hardly a simplification, is the first step in Heinrich's slide towards the inversion of the substance and form of value. According to him, it is not that commodity-producing labor possesses a socially specific attribute that determines them as values, that is, as bearers of the unnatural capacity to relate to each other in exchange. Conversely, for Heinrich, it is the fact that the products of labor are exchanged that determines labor as a producer of value. The inverted determination of value-producing labour by the fact that its products are exchanged is followed by the reduction of value-producing labour to abstract labour abstracted from its historically specific determination by the private form which social labour takes in the capitalist mode of production. And, as usual, Heinrich makes this abstraction of abstract value-producing labour by invoking Marx's name:

> Consequently, Marx speaks of value-producing labour as "abstract" labour.[182]

Heinrich thus erases the fact that, when labor is organized in a directly social way, the productive expenditure of the human body in general, that is, abstract human labor, does not produce value. It is precisely for this reason that he takes the first step in inversion: if at the starting point, labor owes its condition as a producer of value to the fact that its products are exchanged, followed by the fact that the labor that produces value is abstract labor, the possibility that there is abstract labor that does not produce value is erased. Moreover, even the apparent simplicity of Heinrich's phrase contains another step in the erasure of the materiality of abstract labor and of its specific social determination as a producer of value by the private character of labor:

> Consequently, Marx describes abstract labor as the "value-forming substance" or as the "substance of value." The "substance of value" as a figure of speech has often been understood in a quasi-physical, "substantialist" way: the worker has expended a specific amount of abstract labor and this quantity exists within the individual commodity and turns the isolated article into an object of value.[183]
> Not only has the analysis deployed to discover the specificity of value-producing labor

[181] Michael Heinrich, An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx's Capital (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2012, p. 48).
[182] Ibid, p. 48, own translation.
[183] Ibid, p. 49, own translation.

been reduced to a "talk" about it, but the discovery of socially necessary abstract labor materialized privately and independently in its product as the "substance of value" of the latter, is degraded to the condition of a mere "figure of speech." In this way, Heinrich converts the substance of value into a merely ideal existence, into a pure concept:

> Abstract labor is not visible, only a particular concrete labor is visible, just as the concept of "tree" is not visible...[184]

Heinrich denies the visibility of a materiality that is immediately visible: the materiality of the fact that, when a human being works, he is productively spending his body, in whatever concrete form he does it, and materializing that expenditure in his product, whatever it may be. And, moreover, that when it comes to simple producers of commodities, each of them has full control over the expenditure of his body by carrying it out privately and independently. Thus his conception of abstract labor, which started from inverting the determination of its historical specificity as a producer of value, closes its inverted circle, presenting the materiality of abstract labor, devoid of historical specificity by the private form of social labor, as an abstract mental construction, powerless to account for the historically specific determination of value:

> However, the reduction of various kinds of labor to labor in the physiological sense is a purely mental abstraction, to which any kind of labor can be subject, regardless of whether it produces commodities. Moreover, this formulation suggests that abstract labor has a completely non-social, natural foundation, and has consequently led to "naturalistic" interpretations of abstract labor. [...] On the other hand, abstract labor cannot be "spent" at all.[185]

In short, where Marx literally exposes his discovery about the materiality of abstract labor as a physiological productive expenditure of the human body whatever the concrete modality in which it is carried out, and as such common to everything in the form of society,[186] but that only when it is carried out privately and independently is its materialization in the product represented as the attribute of the latter to socially relate its producers,[187] Heinrich

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[184] Ibid, p. 49, own translation.

[185] Ibid, p. 50, own translation.

[186] In Marx's original terms:

> As we see, the mystical character of the commodity [...] does not spring from the content of its determinations of value either. In the first place, because however much useful work or productive activities may differ, it is an incontrovertible physiological truth that all these activities are functions of the human organism and that each of them, whatever its content and form, represents an essential expenditure of the human brain, of nerves, muscles, senses, etc. (Marx, Capital, op. cit., vol. I, p. 37).

[187] Again in Marx's original terms:

> And what has reason to exist only in this concrete form of production, in the production of commodities, namely, that the specifically social character of private labour independent of each other resides in what they have of the same as modes of human labour, taking the form of the

believes he sees "naturalistic interpretations" of a "concept" resulting from a "purely mental abstraction." The whole secret of the apparent analysis by which Heinrich arrives at this erasure of the substance of value was already to be found in the initial reversal of this analysis, where labor appeared to owe its status as a producer of value to the fact that its product was exchanged.

Once he has emptied the value of his substance, Heinrich proposes to present this same substance inverted as springing from the form of value, i.e., exchange-value:

> Abstract labor is a relation of social validation (Geltungsverhaltnis) that is constituted in exchange. In exchange, the concrete acts of expended labour count as a particular quantum of abstract labour constituting value, or are valid as a specific quantum of abstract labour, and therefore as an element of the total labour of society.[188]

Faced with this conception of abstract labor, the question immediately arises: What is the norm that governs this "relationship of social validation," that is, what need is realized by taking shape in it? In other words, why should the product of a particular labour normally be validated as equivalent to *x* quantity of "abstract labour", and not to some other quantity of it? Or, what determines that the product of x hours of concrete labor is normally validated as equivalent to the product of y hours of other concrete labor, as "abstract labor"? And, in a general way, on what qualitative basis is "social validation" quantitatively determined? For, in the real world, change continues to take the form of a quantitative relation, the existence and commensurability of which presupposes the existence of a common quality at both poles of the relation.[189] Let's see:

> Commodities do not possess objectivity of value as objectifications of concrete labour, but as objectifications of abstract labour. If, however, as we have just delineated, abstract labor is a socially validating relation that exists only in exchange (where privately spent labor counts as abstract labor constituting value), then value also exists first in exchange. What is more, value is not at all a property that an individual thing possesses in itself. The substance of value, value, which forms the basis of this objectivity, is not inherent in individual commodities, but is mutually bestowed upon each other in the act of exchange.[190]

Heinrich's answer jumps from the sheer material heterogeneity of concrete labor to the private form in which social labor is organized. A form that lacks materiality in itself, as is obvious. He thus arrives at an "abstract work" that, thanks to the leap taken along the way, has

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value character of the products of labour. (Ibid, pp. 39-40).

[188] Heinrich, An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx's Capital, op. cit., pp. 50-51.

[189] It is a question of a property inherent in the thing and of the necessity that this property carries within itself, by its very determination, to manifest itself in a relative form:

> . . . The properties of an object do not arise from its relation to other objects, since this relation only confirms them. (Marx, Capital, op. cit., p. 24).

[190] Heinrich, An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx's Capital, op. cit., pp. 52-53.

lost its materiality to become an abstractly conceptual existence. Which is completely empty of substance that can be manifested in the change, as it now turns out that it is the change itself that engenders it.

Private work is a way of organizing social labor, that is, of assigning the materiality of the total labor power of society under the different concrete useful forms of labor to be materially performed by each productive member of society. Undoubtedly, this historically specific way of carrying out this assignment operates by determining the material forms with which social labor is executed. It does this by giving each producer full control over his individual labour and depriving him of all control over the social character of it. But this fact does not modify in one iota the fact that the materiality of work is irreducible to the social form of its organization. And that, therefore, appealing to "private labour" does not free the question that, in the relation of equality between quantities of qualitatively different use-values, there must be underlying a common quality of labour privately materialised in them, and that this quality is alien to the heterogeneity of concrete labour.

It is then that Heinrich tries to evade the question by turning it upside down: it is not that change shows that the two poles of the relation have the same property in equal quantity, but that the realization of the relation of exchange establishes a quantitative proportionality abstracted from all qualitative content, from which the existence of the common quality results. In other words, according to Heinrich, it is not that in the realization of the exchange relation it becomes clear that commodities possess an attribute which has enabled them to enter it, but that commodities enter exchange empty of attribute and leave it with the attribute of being "values," and the labor that produced them with the attribute of being "abstract."

On this basis, Heinrich goes a step further to the negation of socially necessary abstract labor materialized in its product privately and independently as the substance that constitutes the qualitative basis that is objectified in the relation of equality that takes shape in exchange. He inverts it as if it arose from the very existence of this exchange, i.e., the determination of value by its necessary form of exchange-value:

> Only the labour time expended under the existing average conditions of production, as well as for the satisfaction of the social demand for money, constitutes value.[191]

The mere reference to "the labour-time expended under the average conditions of production" corresponding to a certain class of commodity reveals the obliteration of the material quality of labour to which Heinrich has had recourse in order to reduce it to the abstraction of its pure social quality of "private labour". It so happens that the mere reference to different production techniques that converge to form an average amount of expended labor implies the coexistence of different modalities of concrete labor applied to produce the same type of use value. And, therefore, the determination of the medium in question requires the existence of a common quality, not between different branches, but within each of them. The expenditure of human labor power in general, that is, the materiality of socially necessary abstract labor performed privately, sneaks into Heinrich's determination of the exchangeability

[191] Heinrich, An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx's Capital, op. cit., p. 51.

of commodities, no matter how much he tries to expel it into the realm of concepts.

But now even the very determination of the character of "socially necessary" suffers the consequences of the denial of the determination of the substance of value by the materiality of abstract labor performed privately and independently. It is no longer that the private allocation of the capacity to perform social labour gives each producer full control over his individual concrete labour at the expense of having no control over the determination of his product as socially useful or useless. As a result, the product of socially necessary labour performed privately can acquire this condition only at the very moment when labour is materialised in it, that is, at the very moment of its production. But the fact of possessing such an attribute, that is, being a commodity, can only be manifested when this product proves to be a carrier of it by entering into a relation of exchange with another commodity in quantities of whose body it expresses its value, that is, that it functions as its equivalent. Therefore, the socially necessary character of a certain amount of abstract labor materialized in a private way will always manifest itself as such in circulation, confronted as a counterpart with a social need capable of representing itself through that equivalent. Correspondingly, the socially useless character of a privately materialized abstract labor will manifest its condition as such when it tries to enter into a relationship of exchange and cannot do so because it does not have the necessary attribute to do so. It is the fact that social labour is carried out privately that means that the unity between social production and consumption can only be established in this indirect way, after the former has been completed. And consequently, let this indirect unity take, in the circulation of commodities, the form of the relation between the supply and demand of commodities. Again, it is the substance of value that determines the necessity of its form.[192] But, since Heinrich denies the substance of value in order to reduce it to a "social validation" that occurs in circulation, the socially necessary character of abstract value-producing labor is inverted in the form of "as well as for the satisfaction of the social monetary demand," which determines the quantum of this validation. And once again, the form appears inverted as a determinant of the necessity of the substance. From this inverted point of view, it would be necessary to first know what money is and what demand is, in order to explain what value is.

From the same inversion, Heinrich continues that, in the determination of the value of a commodity, the relationship between its supply and demand is involved. This implies that, under any circumstances, commodities are always sold for their value. And it implies, therefore, the impossibility of the existence of a substance of value that determines the exchange capacity of a commodity, other than the magnitude of its 'social validation' by the very equality established in exchange:

> To what extent the private labour expended has actually been necessary to satisfy

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[192] Marx sums up the question as follows:

> The exchange or sale of commodities for their value is rational, the natural law that governs their equilibrium; it must be used to explain the divergences; and not the other way around, starting from divergences to explain the law. [...] The true internal laws of capitalist production cannot be explained, obviously, by the mutual play of supply and demand. For these laws are realized in all their purity only where supply and demand cease to act, that is, where they coincide (Marx, Capital, op. cit., vol. III, pp. 191-193).

> demand depends, on the one hand, on the amount of this demand and, on the other, on the volume of production of other producers, which are first revealed in the exchange.[193]

The analysis of this determination requires going beyond the question of the substance of value and its necessary form as exchange value, in order to advance in the unfolding of the concrete movement of value in circulation. This implies that we must advance by reproducing on our own the development presented by Marx in the third chapter of Capital, regarding the function of money as a medium of circulation. Having done so, our exposition is limited here to the determination specifically in question.

Heinrich considers that to support his assertion it is enough to present a quotation from Marx. We are going to take this same quote as the starting point of our analysis. For this reason, we transcribe it at greater length than the portion quoted by Heinrich:

> Let us start from the assumption that only the socially necessary average of labor time has been invested in its product. The price of the commodity, therefore, will be nothing more than the money-name of the quantity of social labour embodied in it. […] Let us suppose, finally, that each piece of linen that comes on the market contains only the socially necessary labor time. In spite of this, it may happen that in the sum total of the pieces of linen that flow into the market there is superfluous labor time. If the stomach of the market is not sufficiently capable of assimilating the total quantity of linen which flows into it at the normal price, we shall have in this the proof that an excessive quantity of the total labour-time of society has been invested in the form of textile labour. The result will be exactly the same as if any weaver had invested more labour time in his individual product than is socially necessary. Those who do it together, pay for it together. The canvas that comes to the market is considered as a single commercial article and each piece as an aliquot part of it. In fact, the value of each individual rod of linen is nothing more than the materialization of the same socially determined sum of human labor of the same nature. [...] The division of labor converts the product of labor into a commodity, thereby making its transformation into money necessary. At the same time, it makes the fact that this transubstantiation takes place or not a purely accidental fact. But here we must analyze the phenomenon in all its purity, assuming that it develops in a normal way. Moreover, whatever the conditions in which this phenomenon develops, a change of form will take place, provided that the commodity finds an outlet, provided that it is not unsellable, although there may be the anomaly that this change of form suppresses or adds substance, magnitude of value.[194]

The normality which governs the indirect unity between the social production and consumption of a commodity corresponds to the point at which its producers, as a whole, have privately applied a total quantity of abstract labour which puts them in a position to dispose of the product of the same quantity of abstract labour privately materialised by other producers in

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[193] Heinrich, An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx's Capital, op. cit., pp. 51-52.
[194] Marx, Capital, op. cit., vol. I, pp. 67-68

the concrete forms resulting from the commodities which satisfy the needs of the former. The key to the question of whether or not the imbalance between supply and demand plays a role in determining the value of commodities lies in discovering whether, when the former exceeds the latter, the substance of value abnormally suppressed in circulation has vanished without a trace. And it lies in discovering what is the source of the substance of abnormally added value in circulation, in the opposite case.

Let us suppose that the socially necessary abstract labour required to produce one unit of the commodity A is 10 hours, a substance of value which is expressed in $10, and that the solvent social necessity - that is, the social need capable of being represented by value - which corresponds to this value is 100 units. Let us suppose, however, that the producers of A have produced 110 units, i.e., instead of applying the 1000 hours of socially necessary abstract labour, they have applied 1100 hours. Suppose that in order for the solvent social need to expand to reach this amount, it is necessary that each unit be sold at $9. Suppose, finally, that all the purchasers of commodity A have sold their own commodities for the value of these, so that they have received $1 for the product of each hour of socially necessary abstract labor they have performed. Finding themselves in circulation with their buyers, the sellers of A deliver the product of 1100 hours of socially necessary labor, but receive only $990. They have contributed to social consumption the product of these 1100 hours of abstract socially necessary labour, but they can only withdraw for themselves the product of 990 hours of equal labour. In fact, from his point of view, 110 hours of socially necessary abstract labor, that is, of substance of value, have vanished. But let's look at the same situation from the point of view of the buyers of A. They have contributed the product of 990 hours of abstract socially necessary labour to social consumption, but they have taken from the market the product of 1100 hours of equal labour. In the indirect unity between social production and consumption, all the product of the 1990 hours of abstract socially necessary labor performed privately has passed into the sphere of social consumption. Only, it is precisely thanks to this private manner in which this labour has been materialised in its product in its respective concrete forms, that some producers have applied 1100 hours of their labour to produce for social consumption and received the product of 990 hours of social labour, while others have contributed to social consumption the product of 990 hours of social labour and received the product of 1100 hours. Far from having simply vanished into circulation, the portion of the substance of value in question has been appropriated by those who bought the commodities in which it was materialized by paying for them below their value.

Let's take the reverse case. Suppose that the producers of commodity A have produced only 900 units and therefore applied 900 hours of socially necessary abstract labor. Suppose that in order for the normal solvent social need to contract to this amount, it is necessary that each unit be sold at $11. We continue to assume that all the buyers of A have sold their own goods for the value of the goods. Now, A salespeople deliver the product of 900 hours of socially necessary labor, but receive $990. They have contributed to social consumption the product of 900 hours of abstract socially necessary labour, but they withdraw for their own consumption the product of 990 hours of equal labour. From their point of view, the change has added 110 hours of socially necessary abstract labor, that is, of substance of value, to their product, without them having to lift a finger beyond the normal. But let's get on the other side of the counter. The

buyers of A have contributed the product of 990 hours of abstract socially necessary labour to social consumption, but they have only taken from the market the product of 900 hours of equal labour. In the indirect unity between production and social consumption, the entire product of the 1890 hours of socially necessary abstract labour performed privately has been absorbed by social consumption. But while some producers have carried the product of 900 hours of that work to this consumption and disposed of the product of 990 hours for themselves, others have found themselves in the opposite situation. Far from having merely added new substance of value to commodity A in circulation, the portion in question was originally produced by the socially necessary abstract labour of those who afterwards lost it to the producers of A, by buying it at a higher price than its value.

> But the fact that price, as an exponent of the magnitude of the value of the commodity, is the exponent of its proportion of exchange to money, does not mean, on the contrary, that the exponent of its proportion of exchange to money is necessarily that of its magnitude of value.[195]

However much the prices at which commodities are realized may differ from their values, in circulation no more and no less substance of value changes hands than that which enters into it. As the substance of value, abstract labor is not a "relation of validation" that is born in exchange, nor does the relation between supply and demand enter into its determination:

> Now it is evident that the magnitude of the value of the commodity is not regulated by exchange, but, on the contrary, that exchange is regulated by the magnitude of the value of the commodity.[196]

The absurdity of claiming that the relation between supply and demand intervenes in the determination of value is made manifest, even if we consider that, if it did, commodities would always appear to be sold and bought for their value. In which case there would never be any deviation from normality, because it would be a normality devoid of determination, other than that of simply fluctuating at the pace of that relationship. Even the average of these "values" would appear to have no other need than chance, since, if value were that abstract "relation of validation" devoid of substance pre-existing to the change itself, at all times supply and demand would spring up equalized from that same change. Thus, commodity producers would have no way of recognizing whether their action as individual private organs of the process of social metabolism should be modified in one direction or another around a norm.

Curiously, the "new reading of Marx" converges with the most vulgar neoclassical economics in attributing to the play between supply and demand the ability to determine value. And, like her, it can only sustain itself on its own contradictions. Heinrich has told us verbatim, as we have already seen, that:

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[195] Marx, Capital, op. cit., vol. I, pp. 62-63.

[196] Ibid, vol. I, p. 29.

> ... If, as we have just delineated, abstract labor is a socially validating relation that exists only in exchange (where privately expended labor counts as abstract labor constituting value), then value also exists first in exchange.[197]

But now he admonishes us for having fallen into the "nonsense" of believing him, for it turns out that value itself, and consequently logically, "abstract labor constituting value," already exist in production, an activity which obviously precedes the circulation in which exchange takes place:

> However, even the question of whether the value and magnitude of value are determined in the sphere of production or in the sphere of circulation (the sphere of buying and selling) results from a fatal reduction. Value is not simply "there" after it has been "produced" somewhere. [...] Value is not a thing like bread, but a social relationship that appears as a tangible characteristic of a thing. The social relation which is expressed in value and the magnitude of value is constituted in production and circulation, so that the question of "one or the other" is nonsense.[198]

Far from being a materialized social relation, which as such takes the form of a spectral materiality, what Heinrich presents to us is a kind of production process capable of returning to the future, since a value that does not yet exist prevails in it. Thus, value can go from being "a social relation that appears as a tangible characteristic of a thing" to being the expression of a social relation, that is, something that is not the social relation itself in its entirety, while this social relation conveniently remains with its indefinite and even unnamed specificity. An ambiguity that allows it to be everywhere, even in those where the same conception affirms that it cannot be.

We have already seen Rubin's reaction to Marx's exposition in Capital of abstract labour as a generic physiological expenditure of the human body applied productively, which only when it is privately and independently materialised in its product in a socially useful concrete form and under normal conditions is represented as the purely social historically specific attribute of that product. such as the value of commodities. Where Marx discovers this simplest and most fundamental determination of the general social relation in the capitalist mode of production, Rubin sees an incoherent person who literally wrote sentences incompatible with his own theory of value. And even someone who was intellectually regressing with respect to his own previous work, the Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, "where Marx developed his theory more completely." Heinrich not only shares, in fact, Rubin's first perspective, but is determined to nurture the second. Thus, Heinrich sees a Marx whose knowledge of value and its form has reached "emphatic clarity" in writing a draft in preparation for the second edition of Capital, to retreat and end up falling into the abominable affirmation, typical of "naturalistic interpretations", of the physiological character of abstract work in the

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[197] Heinrich, An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx's Capital, op. cit., pp. 52-53.
[198] Ibid, p. 54, own translation.

published text. Let's see:

> The substance of value, value, which forms the basis of this objectivity, is not inherent in individual commodities, but is mutually bestowed upon each other in the act of exchange. The most emphatic statement made by Marx in this regard can be found in his revised manuscript for the second edition. There he states that, when the sack is exchanged for the linen, then both are "reduced to an objectification of human labor per se." However, it should not be forgotten that "neither of them is in and of itself objectivity of value [Wertgegenstandlichkeit], they are so only insofar as they have this objectivity in common. Outside of their relationship with the other – the relationship in which they are equalized – neither the sack nor the linen possess objectivity of value or objectivity as crystallizations of human labor per se (MEGA, 2.6:30)."[199]

To begin with, the existence of a substance and its expression or objectification are not synonymous. Everyone knows that thought is the substance that is socially objectified in words, even if there are those who seem to speak without thinking. That is, because thought exists per se, but because of its qualitative determination it cannot manifest itself, it needs to express itself as the substance that takes form in the word.

But Heinrich goes beyond the identification between substance and objectification. What it does is falsify the flow of Marx's text. He attributes Marx with affirming that it is by changing that the sack and the canvas are "reduced to an objectification of human labor per se." But Marx explicitly arrives at this point in his draft by exposing the process of analysis of the immediate manifestation of the exchange relation. And it is through this analysis that he discovers abstract labor as the substance of value. He is far from doing so by deploying the necessary form of it as exchange-value, as Heinrich intends to present it:

> Commodities acquire expression of value (form of value) only in relation to each other. [...] Where does it come from? How is it that this peculiarity common to all forms of commodity value arises from the concept of value? Originally we find the concept of value of commodities as follows: We take an exchange ratio as 1 sack = 20 yards of linen. We said: here the sack and the canvas express something common [...]. This common is not its use-value or useful corporeality. [...] In its equalization, it has been abstracted. It is, therefore, their character as products of labor. [...] As products of labor, the sack and the linen are the same insofar as they are products of the same labor as mere objectifications of human labor without more. This is its value. Thus, the sack and the canvas as values, each for itself, have been reduced to the objectification of human labor per se.[200]

Starting from the "neither...", in what follows from the quotation presented by Heinrich,

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[199] I
IDB, p. 53.

[200] Karl Marx, "Erganzungen und Veranderungen zum ersten Band des "Kapitals"", in Karl Marx Friedrich Engels Gesamtausgabe (MEGA), Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1987, vol. 6, division 2, pp. 29-30, own translation.

Marx clearly refers to the objectification or necessary expression of value in the form of exchange value, not to the determination of its substance as the objectification of abstract human labour. It is worth remembering that, because the socially necessary abstract labour which constitutes the substance of the value of a commodity is carried out privately and independently, no commodity can present its own body as an objectification of its own value. The value of a commodity can only manifest itself when it is objectified in quantities of the use-value of another kind of commodity, thus taking its concrete form of exchange-value.

But Heinrich adds a second quote from the same draft that he considers Forceful:

> Consequently, "a product of labour, considered in isolation, is not value, nor is it a commodity. It is only value in its unity with another product of labor" (MEGA, 2.6:31).[201]

But the apparent forcefulness of the quote has no other support than the clipping of Marx's text:

> *The form of value of the commodity given in the relation of value of different commodities.*
> 1) The production of labor corporations as values reduces them to expressions of the same unity, (that which is common to them, the same in them) to human labor per se as their common substance. This includes: relation to human labour as a unit, relation of commodities to each other, as expressions of the same unity. Or the relation of the products of labour to each other as expressions of this same unity is their value. And it is only through relation that the mere products of labour become useful objects-commodities. A product of labour, therefore, considered in isolation by itself, is not value, so little as it is a commodity. It is value only in its unity with another product of labour, or in the relation in which the various products of labour are equal to each other as crystallizations of the same unity, of human labour. Hence it follows: Since the value of commodities is nothing but their relation to labour as their common substance, or their relation to each other as an expression of this common substance, this value of a commodity can only manifest itself in the relation of value in which it is connected with other commodities. or only in the relation of value of different commodities. Consequently, the expression of value can only be found, or commodities can only receive the form of value, in their relation to other commodities. This shows us how the form of value arises from the very nature of value. If I say that this product of labor is value because human labor is expended on it, then this is merely subsumption of the product of labor under the concept of value. It is an abstract expression that includes more than what it says. For the product of labour is reduced only to this concept of value, in order to reduce it to a

[201] Heinrich, An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx's Capital, op. cit., p. 53.

> thing which has the same substance as all the other products of labour. Therefore, the relationship with other products of labor is assumed. [...] The expression, although it says nothing about this relationship, includes it.[202]

At first glance, it may seem that Marx is simply unfolding the formal necessity of unity between the substance of value and its objectification in exchange. The first is born in production, where the products of labor acquire the common quality that makes their relationship possible as materializations of human labor per se. As a common quality of the products of labor, this substance has no way of objectifying itself as a relation between the body of each product and the labor per se that has produced it. It can only be objectified through the relation between the bodies of commodities which contain equal quantities of it, i.e., as exchange-value. But what Marx is really deploying is the real necessity of unity between the substance of value and its form as exchange-value. Except that, here, Marx does not make directly explicit by itself, the specificity of commodity-producing social labour. That is, it does not refer directly to the fact that it is socially useful work organized in a private and independent way. But it implicitly introduces this specificity of commodity-producing labour by passing from the abstract hitherto formally common attribute to the concrete exercise of this attribute in its determination as the real capacity of commodities to enter into the exchange relation. A capacity that the products of directly socially organized labor lack, even though they are, equally, materializations of human labor per se. That is why the term "value" is not abstractly reduced to the expression "materialized abstract labor." It expresses the specific determination of abstract labor materialized in a private way that needs to manifest its condition of being socially useful through the entry of these materializations of its own in a relationship of equality with others equivalent to them. For this reason, the term "value" includes the necessity of the exchange relation, the necessity of expressing oneself in the exchange relation.

Not surprisingly, Marx remarks that his exposition "shows how the form of value arises from the very nature of value." Quite the opposite of the inverted appearance with which Heinrich tries to present it, with the pretension of making Marx appear by saying that the substance of value arises from its form.' The "most emphatic affirmation made by Marx" to which Heinrich appeals in favor of his inverted construction, blows it up as soon as the adulteration and the curtailment on which it seeks to sustain itself is revealed.

Since it is proper to a conception for which form determines the substance of the content, or what amounts to the same thing, that there is no content other than the form, Heinrich starts by denying the development of the generic human being - defined by himself as "that which separates them [real humans] from animals, that is, they develop their potentiality and ability through work"[203] and alienation, as manifest objects of Capital.[204] Consequently, it cannot recognize that the historically specific way that the development of the generic human being

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[202] Marx, "Erganzungen und Veranderungen zum ersten Band des 'Kapitals'", op. cit., vol. 6, division 2, pp. 31-32, own translation.

[203] Heinrich, An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx's Capital, op. cit., p. zz.

[204] Ibid, p. 22, own translation.

unfolds in the capitalist mode of production is embodied in the fact that its subjects confront their own social being as if they lacked it, as individuals who are mutually free from personal dependence and who carry out their social labor privately; which is why they face the development of their generic being as if it were the realization of a power foreign to them, as if it were the realization of a power that naturally belongs to the product of their own social labor. Consequently, Heinrich cannot recognize the historically specific determination of the consciousness and will of the subjects as free, because it is alienated in the commodity; that is, that it is a matter of a conscience and will alienated by its content, which necessarily takes form in its opposite, in personal freedom. And he cannot recognize that commodity fetishism is the simplest and most general form of this alienated consciousness. Nor can he recognize that the need to overcome this fetishism can only arise from the fact that the alienated development of the material productive forces of social labor needs to take shape in a consciousness that advances in its freedom because it knows itself to be objectively alienated.

It is in this way that Heinrich ends up highlighting where his inversion of the determinations of value leads. From his inverted point of view, value is not the simplest content of the general social relation that governs the development of a historically specific material form of the productive forces of human labor. Nor is the determination of people as personifications of value the concrete form with which they govern their conscious and voluntary action as individual organs of the social metabolism process[205]. According to Heinrich, it is the opposite: the existence of value is explained by the behavior of human beings. Consequently, the need to overcome value is inverted into the abstract possibility of thinking about changing that behavior:

> ... The rule of value over human beings is not a natural law of society, but the result of a very specific behavior of human beings, and this behavior can, at least in principle, be changed. A society without commodities and money is conceivable.[206]

And, in turn, fetishism is diluted in an abstract "structural background" that as such operates externally affecting the consciousness and will of individuals, and that they can "penetrate" by opposing it with the exercise of a consciousness and will that is no less abstractly free:

> However, this fetishism is also not a completely closed universal context of deception from which there is no escape. Rather, it constitutes a structural background that is always present, but affects different individuals with varying strength and can be

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[205] In all respects, the opposite of:

> "The capitalist mode of production thus exhausts its historical reason for existence—namely, the development of society's material productive forces through the transformation of the productive powers of individual free labor into the powers of directly social labor, consciously organized by the collective worker performing it, in the form of the alienation of this labor's powers as the social powers of its material product" (Iñigo Carrera, *El capital: razón histórica, sujeto revolucionario y conciencia*, op. cit., p. 39).

[206] Heinrich, An lntroduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx's Capital, op. cit., p. 77.

penetrated on the basis of experience and reflection.[207]

As always, behind the conception that value has no content other than its form lies the conception of human consciousness and will as abstractly free by nature.

10.2.13 Holloway

With the inevitable attribution to Marx, Holloway begins by reversing the determination of the consciousness of the commodity producer:

> The "mystical character of commodities," says Marx, does not arise from their use-value but from the form of the commodity itself, i.e., from the fact that the product of alienated labor takes the form of a commodity.[208]

According to Holloway, it is not that the consciousness of the commodity producer is alienated because his material product is at the same time the bearer of his general social relation, but that, conversely, the fact that consciousness is alienated causes his material product to take the form of a commodity.[209] From the outset, consciousness alienated in the commodity has lost its historical condition of being the content of free consciousness and, consequently, this itself emerges conceived as the abstract negation of alienation.

To achieve such an abstraction, Holloway needs to bring out of view the historically specific determination of social labour in the capitalist mode of production, namely, the private form in which it is carried out. He does so by simply quoting the text where Marx expressly highlights this determination, as if it were an empty observation in passing.[210] From then on, the private nature of work disappears from view, to the point of literally doing so from the rest of Holloway's book. In this way, instead of having to ask about the specific productive attributes of social labor carried out privately and independently, he goes on to close the circle of his conception according to which free consciousness abstractly pre-exists alienation, and alienation springs from an externally imposed determination:

> In capitalist society, doing is turned against itself, it is alienated from itself; we lose control over our creative activity. This denial of human creativity takes place through the subjection of human activity to the market.[211]

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[207] Heinrich, An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx's Capital, op. cit., p. 185.

[208] John Holloway, Changing the World Without Taking Power, Buenos Aires: Revista Herramienta y Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, 2002, p. 81.

[209] The secret of this reversal does not go beyond having reversed Marx's discovery of the reality of commodity fetishism, to turn it into a "concept" opportunely introduced:

> Marx introduces fetishism in the context of commodity production and exchange.... The concept of fetishism is central to Marx's critique of capitalist society (ibid, pp. 83-87).

[210] LBID, p. 82.

[211] LBID, pp. 213-214.

Thus we have that, according to Holloway, commodity production, and therefore exchange, exist because consciousness is alienated, and consciousness in turn is alienated because change exists. However, all that seems to matter to Holloway about this circular dialectic is that, once the historical specificity of private labour has been erased on its basis, it can take the place of private labour with a concept of labour which satisfies the abstract movement of its two consciousnesses. Then, again in Marx's supposed name, abstract labor ceases to be the material expenditure of human labor power common to all forms of society, to become a labor emptied of creativity specifically proper to the capitalist mode of production:

> Similarly, in Capital, Marx derives not all the categories of political economy from human creativity but rather from the dual, self-antagonistic, self-dividing existence of human creativity into concrete labor and abstract labor
> ... This ever-renewed process provides a specific form of doing (as abstract labor, labor abstracted from any particular content, production of value, production of surplus value), ...
> ... On the one hand, the fact that value is the product of abstract labor points to the absolute dependence of capital on labor and its abstraction.[212]

However, Holloway needs to go even further than the production of value itself in his development of the abstraction of the consciousness of the commodity-producer as the split between an abstractly free consciousness and an abstractly alienated consciousness. It needs to present this abstraction as if it were the determination of consciousness that engenders the capitalist mode of production by itself:

> simply because exploitation implies a struggle, logically prior, to convert creativity into alienated labor, to define certain activities as producers of value.[213]

Now, human history has become the fantastic history of the struggle between an abstractly free consciousness which, as such, resists alienation, but which has been forced into it by the action of another consciousness which, being no less free than the first, seems to have resolved to apply its freedom to the oppression of the former. Holloway does not give a reason for this oppressive "creativity". On the contrary, his whole interest is focused on the way in which naturally free consciousness, subjected to alienation through the fetishism of the commodity based on "abstract labor," can recover the supposed fullness of its "creativity."

Does the path proposed by Holloway pass through the development of a social relationship based on the objective knowledge of one's own individual determinations as concrete ways of carrying out the process of social metabolism and, therefore, as an attribute of a consciousness that advances in its freedom because it knows itself to be alienated? Quite the opposite. Holloway proclaims his horror at the very possibility of objective knowledge as overcoming alienation, and he boasts of it:

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[212] Ibid, pp. 173-174, 81 and 2 16.

[213] Holloway, Changing the World Without Taking Power, op. cit., p. 216.

The crisis of the revolutionary subject is its liberation from knowledge.

... So how do we change the world without taking power? At the end of the book, as at the beginning, we don't know.... When asked, we tend to cough and sputter and try to change the subject.... Our not-knowing is also the not-knowing of those who understand that not-knowing is part of the revolutionary process.[214]

However, before the attack of modesty, or rather the hymn to irrationality with which he closes his work, Holloway has already proposed the development of a form of social relation, according to him, capable of engendering consciousness free of any subordination to alienation:

> The cry-against and the power-to-do movement (the two axes of this book) are inextricably intertwined. In the process of fighting-against, relationships are formed that are not the mirror image of the power relations against which the struggle is directed: relationships of comradeship, of solidarity, of love, relationships that prefigure the kind of society we are fighting for.[215]

But what content do these relationships have? Companionship, and even more so solidarity, are social relations in which the individuality of the other is the way in which one's own social being exists, a unity that is externally expressed in the relationship, is realized under the appearance of corresponding to the existence of mutually independent individualities who, responding to their respective consciences and free wills, they enter into a relationship with each other to constitute, only from there, a unity. In short, they are a specific concrete form that carries social interdependence between individuals who see themselves, and who need to govern their action, as if they were naturally free. On the other hand, love is a social relationship where the very form of unitary existence of the social being of one in the individuality of the other - to which we just referred - is presented as the renunciation of the condition of naturally free individual of one with respect to the other, to give way to said unity under the concrete form of a relationship of personal dependence with that other.

The relations that Holloway says "prefigure the kind of society we are fighting for" are certainly not mirror images of commodity relations. They are concrete forms that commodity relations take and, therefore, commodity relations themselves.[216] Moreover, it is a question of commodity relations under which the general social interdependence carried by the apparent individual independence takes on the concrete inverted form of being direct relations between people. From the fact of starting by naturalizing the free consciousness of the commodity producer, the only thing that can result is the cultivation - pseudo-critical in this case, because the alienated consciousness has also been naturalized from the outset - of the eternity of

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[214] Ibid, pp. 304 and 308-309.

[215] Ibid, p. 223.

[216] We shall have occasion to dwell on them shortly after we advance on the mode in which the exchange relation is realized, and in particular when we reach this realization with respect to the exchange relation which is the immediate bearer of the historical determination of the capitalist mode of production, namely, the purchase and sale of labour-power.

consciousness that is free because it is the bearer of alienation in the commodity.

10.2.14 Moore (Ecological Marxism)

Moore starts by stating that:

> Civilizations are shaped and defined by their priorities: by deciding what things and what relationships are valuable. Their rules of reproduction of power and wealth revolve around these choices about what is – and what is not – valuable.[217]

According to Moore, each civilization is defined and shaped by "choosing" what has "value" for it. On what does the course of this "choice" depend? Of the class struggle:

> This alternative can only be realized—it can only be organized today—through a class struggle that redefines what is valuable (and what is not) in the civilization we want to build.[218]

And where do the determinations of the class struggle spring from? Of the existence of opposing "projects" with respect to the "choices about what is – and what is not – valuable":

> Capitalism, as a project, seeks to create a world in the image of capital, in which all the elements of human and extra-human nature are effectively interchangeable.... This effort to create a world in the image of capital is capitalism's project of correspondence, through which capital seeks to compel the rest of the world to correspond to its desire for a universe of "economic equivalence." But, of course, the world – extra-human natures of all kinds, but also the re/productive classes – doesn't want a world of capitalist equivalence very much. At a certain point, all of life rebels against the value/monoculture nexus of modernity. Therefore, the struggle for the relationship between humans and the rest of nature is necessarily a class struggle [...]. In this way, capitalism's project of correspondence converges with all kinds of visions and resistances that confront and oppose it to create a contradictory historical process.[219]

That is, for Moore, the different social forms that the historical organization of human life has taken are not an expression of the development of the productive forces of human labor, nor does the class struggle have as its content this development, nor is human consciousness the product of the corresponding social being. Conversely, for him, human consciousness produces projects for society, which settle its supremacy through the class struggle in which "the rest of nature" takes sides, the result of which depends on the "priorities" with which society will "choose" what is "valuable" for it. A crude idealistic inversion, with animistic overtones.

Now, the adjective "valuable" refers universally to three meanings: to the utility that

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[217] Jason Moore, Capitalism in the Web of Life, London and New York: Verso, 2015, p. 215.
[218] Moore, Capitalism in the Web of Life, op. cit., p. 289, see also pp. 55, 207 and 288.
[219] Ibid, p. 207, own translation.

something has for its use, or use value, to the proportion in which one commodity is exchanged for others, or exchange value, and to the subjective attributes recognized as socially positive. However, Moore notably leaves the difference between the first two in a nebula:

> In the English language, value means two things. First, it refers to those objects and relationships that are valuable. Second, it refers to notions of morality,...[220]

In any case, since according to Moore it is a "choice" that every form of society must face at its starting point, the term "valuable" can only refer to one aspect that is present in all of them. Unless it is believed, with neoclassical economics, that value, as a commodity attribute, is a natural quality of things, the use of the term "valuable" necessarily refers to what a use value is for each society. In turn, with respect to relationships, it refers to those that "the dominant ethical-political judgments" consider valuable.[221]

Moore's nebula of the difference between use-value and exchange-value, and the way in which he appeals to the ambiguity of the term "valuable" in its dual sense of serving a purpose and being "morally" positive, are not mere accidents. His intention becomes evident as soon as he slips over them to consider the specificity of the capitalist mode of production:

> For capitalism, the choice has been clear, and peculiar: "Value" is determined by the productivity of labor in commodity production: the average labor time embodied in the average commodity.[222]

For Moore, the private organization of social labor is not the primary determinant of the historical specificity of the capitalist mode of production. Nor, therefore, is value the representation as a purely social attribute of commodities, of the socially necessary abstract labor materialized in them, because such labor has taken concrete forms privately and independently. On the contrary, for Moore, the value of commodities is a "choice" imposed by the architects of the capitalist "project" upon "extra-human natures of all kinds, but also re/productive classes" within the "historical process" of class struggle—even though this "world... does not much want a world of capitalist equivalence." And, in this "choice," the labor whose productivity defines "value" lacks any historical specificity regarding its mode of organization, beyond the reference to its manifest immediacy in producing commodities.

On the basis of this historiography of a children's storybook, where even generically human historical subjectivity is reduced to the secondary condition of the "but also", Moore advances in the deployment of his inversions:

> [Capitalist] relations of exploitation produce abstract social labor.[223]
> Abstract social labor, in this reading, is the economic expression of the law of value.[224]

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[220] Ibid, p. 204. Moore uses the resource of writing the English word "valuable", that is, valuable, as "valuable" which leads to the assumption that. Beyond the quantitative aspect, he wants to emphasize the qualitative aspect: the ability to have value or be valued.

[221] Ibid, p. 51, own translation.

[222] Ibid, p. 51, own translation.

[223] Moore, Capitalism in the Web of Lije, op. cit., p. 16.

[224] Ibid, pp. 66-67, own translation.

Moore is yet another supporter of the denial that abstract human labor is a physiological expenditure of human labor power in general, and therefore common to all forms of society. And that such material expenditure is only represented in a historically specific way as the social attribute of its product, the value of the commodity, when the concrete useful form in which it is to be performed by each member of society for the others is privately and independently assigned among mutually free individuals. Opposed to this, Moore believes that human labor acquires the specific historical quality of abstractness, devoid of all materiality, thanks to the value form of its product. Moreover, he believes that abstract labor is in itself a product of the capitalist social relation, and not an attribute of the productive activity that gives substance to that social relation. Moore joins those who invert the relationship, convinced that form determines the need for content.

However, Moore goes further in reversing the relationship between value and capital. It is no longer a question of capital being value that is valorized, but of capital "choosing" what has value and what does not. And it turns out that this entelechy in which the objectified social relation has been inverted has "chosen" to value a certain indistinctly "natural" form and to deny "value" to "the greater part of nature," as "valuable" as the former:

> In systemic terms, Cheap Nature occurs when the interconnected action of capital, science, and empire - blunt categories, yes - succeed in liberating new sources of human and extra-human nature free of charge or at low cost to capital.[225]

The terms "cheap nature", "free" and "low cost" have an unequivocal meaning. Cheap is that which has a low price or a price below value; free is what is obtained without giving value in return; Low cost means delivering little value in return. To be cheap, free or low-cost, the first quality that the object must have is to be a carrier of value. Of course, Moore's proposal implies that every use-value produced by human labor, and even every natural object that human labor is going to use as its medium, has value by nature. Or, what is the same, that every product of human labor or natural object appropriable by the human being has the natural attribute of being value, that is, it has by nature the social form of value and, therefore, price. But Moore does not stop here, but goes beyond use values in his naturalization of value, and projects this attribute onto human labor itself. Its attribution of value even extends to the natural processes of transformation of latent energy into active energy, which human work uses to achieve its end. As Moore starts from the belief that the determination of value emanates from a "choice", his alleged "world-historical recovery of the theory of value"[226] He needs to get entangled in something like this: if value is the product of labor, labor cannot have value because it is not itself the product of labor:

> Human labor power in its fluid state, that is, human labor, creates value, but it is not in

[225] Ibid, p. 53, own translation.
[226] Ibid, p. 55, own translation.

itself value. It becomes value when it is shaped, when it takes on corporeal form.[227]

But let's leave aside this umpteenth inversion practiced by Moore, to see where it leads:

> ... the accumulation of capital and its curious privileging wage labor as the only thing worth valuing. Such a civilizational vanity could only arise on the basis of devaluing both human labor outside the commodity system – much of it, wrongly called women's labor – and the "labor" of extrahuman natures [...] And because value has been based on valuing some nature (e.g., wage labor) and not valuing most of nature ("women, nature, colonies"), it needed a powerfully alienating conception of Nature as external.[228]

According to Moore, capital has "chosen" to value in a discriminatory way, granting a "curious privilege to wage labor." So the "morality" that corresponds to the "political ethical-judgment" of the working class "at present" demands that it "choose" that every productive expenditure of human energy, as well as every expenditure of energy from the rest of nature that the former uses as a means to its subjective end, produces value.

Moore has started from denying the materiality of abstract labor, common to all forms of society, to represent it as the historically specific feature that human labor acquires as a result of producing value. It has therefore started from ignoring that the historical specificity of the commodity arises from the private assignment of the materiality of abstract human labour to the various socially useful forms in which it is carried out as concrete labour in the capitalist mode of production. Consequently, he cannot understand why abstract social labour privately materialised in its product needs to be represented as the value of its product. Nor why, the same work materialized in its product under a concrete form governed by bonds of personal dependence does not do so, nor can it nor does it need to do so, because it is directly assigned as a portion of social labor to the person who is going to perform it. That is, he cannot understand why there are use values that are the product of human labor that have the attribute of value and use values, the product of human labor, that do not. In the face of this, Moore ends up extrapolating what is specific to value-producing labor, that is, to private labor, as if it were proper to the universality of human labor.

But Moore goes further, and cannot even recognize that value can only be a social attribute of the product of human labor. And it can only be, because it is historically the form taken by the allocation of the total labour capacity of society under the concrete useful forms in charge of each of its productive members, in so far as the development of the productive forces has advanced by dissolving the direct personal ties which originally governed this allocation.

However, in Moore's conception, the realization of the potentiality enclosed in the natural materiality of the means of production by the action of the human subject, is inverted in the conception of these means as another subject that adds its intervention to the human process of production. Hence, the productive consumption of the means of production by human labor is conceived inverted as a labor performed by these means in its condition as a subject. And

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[227] Marx, Capital, op. cit., vol. I, p. 18.

[228] Moore, Capitalism in the Web of Life, op. cit., pp. 85-86.

since, for Moore, the universality of the labor of any subject has the condition that is specifically proper to private labor, the labor attributed to this invested subject must be "valued," and recognized as a producer of value.

For classical political economy, all human labor produces value by nature. For Moore, all human labor produces value within a "civilization" that has "chosen" to define value in terms of labor productivity. While the former views private labor as the natural form of human labor, the latter regards it as the universal form of human labor—a result of that "choice." Neither perspective recognizes the historical specificity of private labor; nor does either grasp that private labor is the general—though not universal—form of social labor organization within the capitalist mode of production. Both conceptions imply that when a mother breastfeeds her child, she ought to be producing value, and, consequently, a product whose social character would be expressed in monetary terms.

For neoclassical economics, the means of production - whether simply natural or with their naturalness already processed - are "factors of production", that is, as productive subjects as human labor. As such, they have their own productivity, which they apply to the production of useful and scarce objects, the value of which they have the legitimacy of having produced them. For Moore, the means of production - whether simply natural or with their naturalness already processed - have more titles as productive subjects than human labor:

> This new law of value was quite peculiar. Never before had any civilization negotiated this transition from the productivity of land to the productivity of labor as its parameter of measurement of wealth.[229]

Moore forgets that the condition of subjectivity is only proper to living matter, because This has as its specific power the need to act by spending his body in order to appropriate other concrete natural existences, which he uses as means, in order to reproduce his own body. The land is not a subject, nor therefore does it have productivity. Subjects are the vegetable that uses the earth as a means to satisfy its end of producing itself; the animal that uses the vegetable as a means to satisfy its end of producing itself; the human being who produces the vegetable and the animal in order to use them as means to produce himself. Moore succumbs to the alienation of human subjectivity as an attribute of the objectified social relation, as happens to the very vulgar neoclassical economics. And it does so to the point of not finding it necessary to object to the concept of "natural capital" on which a calculation of the "value" produced by nature is based, which it presents as an irrefutable example of the coherence of its approach.[230]

National accounting systems are not records of the total productive activity of society, much less measurements of the "well-being" of society, as the apologists of capital claim. They are records of the movement of the total capital of society, in which the movement of commodities that are not the product of capital is also subsumed.[231] That is why its object is limited to the product of the totality of social labor carried out privately. Now, it is one thing to

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[229] Moore, Capitalism in the Web of Life, op. cit., p. 296.

[230] Costanza, et al., "Toe Value of the World's Ecosystem Services and Natural Capital" (1997), referred to in ibid, p. 64.

[231] Marx, Capital, op. cit., vol. II, pp. 98-99.

discuss the meaning of trying to record the product of the total of social labor, that is, made by one person for the consumption of others, including that organized through direct personal ties. It even discusses the validity of using the price of the products of private labor as a resource to compute the magnitude of the product of labor governed by these personal ties. And, if you like, even discuss the meaning of trying to measure the consumption of non-human energy put into action by human work. But it is quite another to try to erase the historical specificity of the private organization of social labor, theoretically projecting the social attribute exclusively proper to its product, value, to the product of social labor organized directly by the bonds of personal dependence. And, even worse, to project this social attribute to the consumption of non-human energy put into action by human labor.

10.2.15 About social labor governed by personal family ties within general commodity production

As soon as a person productively spends his body so that another has a use-value for himself, he performs social labor. It is therefore determined as an individual productive organ bearing the corresponding portion of the total labor power of society. And, as such a body, it participates in the process in which the concrete work useful for others that each of them is going to carry out is assigned. In a society where this allocation is realized through the private exercise of social labor, the general social relation takes the objectified form of a commodity. Therefore, the ability to access the general social relation, and therefore the generality of the product of social labor, is not a personal attribute. One has this capacity personally only on condition that one has produced commodities.

However, the fact that commodity production is the general form of the allocation of the total labour of society in its concrete forms to be carried out by each individual productive organ, does not exclude that this same allocation follows a more complex course because of its own historical origin in the bonds of personal dependence. It is possible for a person to perform social labor, without his product having the form of a commodity. The first thing that becomes clear in this case is that, however much he may have acted as an individual organ of social labor, the person in question has no way of accessing by himself the general social relation, and therefore the generality of the product of social labor. But the real focus of the matter is in the way in which the person participates in the organization of social labor. Its labour-power participates in the general allocation of social labour in its concrete forms, not as an individual organ producing use-values for general social consumption, but as an appendage to the allocation of labour-power from another individual organ to that general production. Hence its fate as an individual organ specific to the process of social metabolism is subordinated, and rather subject, to that of the product of the labor of that other individual organ. But he has no way of accessing that fate directly. He can do so only through the mediation of his direct personal relationship with the person who has produced the commodity. That is, through a bond of personal dependence, within the general objectified social relationship. The person in question has carried out his social labor as an individual productive organ of the process of social metabolism governed privately, satisfying a need of his own. But his assignment to this social labor has taken concrete form through the personal link with those who have directly recognized him as useful to himself and, therefore, as socially useful in general. It is a social

labor concretely organized directly as such, and not in the form of private work. Therefore, although like any work it is materialized in its product, it does not need, nor can, be socially represented as the value of it.

Like any other personal bond, the one that mediates in this assignment has a reciprocal character, but it is necessarily asymmetrical: one of the parties is not free within the personal relationship, but is so with respect to the general social relationship; the other is not free with respect to the personal bond, but also lacks the general impersonal bond. It therefore lacks, in fact, the condition that makes the essence of human freedom proper to the capitalist mode of production, although formally the condition of such is attributed to it. But not because it suffers from this lack, it lacks alienation in the commodity, which confronts it as a doubly alien power that governs its social life.

Needless to say, despite all the transformations that this modality of being determined as an individual productive and consumptive organ of the process of social life in the capitalist mode of production is still a modality that reaches women in a specifically characteristic way. And their effect continues to extend even when they themselves act directly in the production of the objectified general social relation. Although it is a determination that arises from the simple production of commodities, the discussion around it has focused on the production of labor power for capital and its role in its valorization. Consequently, the critical analysis of the approaches of Marxist political economy requires deploying the concrete determinations, not simply of value, but of the valorization of value. Therefore, we must leave it pending until we reach the corresponding development.

10.2.16 Hilferding

Let us consider, finally, a conception that synthesizes from end to end the inversions and contradictions that define Marxist political economy: that of Hilferding. This author starts by recognizing the exchange of commodities as the expression of "cohesion in society disintegrated into its atoms by private property and the division of labor," as the "intermediary of the social change of matter."[232] But immediately, the inversion begins:

> But it is only as an intermediary of social relations that change is the object of theoretical-economic analysis.[233]

Change is no longer the exercise of the social relationship between private and independent producers, but a third party that mediates in that exercise. Next, this third mediator is inverted into the very determinant of the social relation, that is, into the determinant of the way in which the material unity of the process of social metabolism is governed. The change has become so external to its own content that, from its determination as a way of realizing the unity of the process of social metabolism, it has only been left with the functional being of it:

> Only where change produces the social relation [...] must it fulfil the function of making

[232] Rudolf Hilferding, El capital financiero, Madrid: Editorial Tecnos, 1973, pp. 16-17.
[233] Ibid, p. 16.

the process of social life possible.[234]

For Hilferding, it is not that, by being carried out privately and independently, labor producing social use-values produces, at the same time, the materialized general social relation. Nor that this materialized social relation is manifested as the ability of commodities to enter into exchange. On the contrary, for Hilferding, it is exchange that produces the social relation, that converts use-value into a commodity:

> Within such an act of exchange, the good has become a commodity.[235]

Then, the recognition that value can only be expressed as exchange value because it is social labor materialized in a private and independent way,[236] ends up invested in that:

> It is the common action of commodities in exchange that transforms the individual's private, individual, and concrete time into general, socially necessary, and abstract labor time, which forms value.[237]

According to Hilferding, change is not a consequence of commodities being materializations of socially necessary abstract labor performed privately and independently. Conversely, for him, commodities enter into exchange with no other determination than the individual private disposition over them. And it is change itself that transforms private, concrete labor—which no longer actually exists into abstract and socially necessary labor. From being the form of value, that is, from being the mode of expression the social attribute of commodities, exchange has become the determinant of that attribute. This inversion completes the path, inverted in itself, that Hilferding began with the reversal of change, so that the unity of the process of social metabolism is realized in the determinant of this unity. Thus, he has managed to present change as having no other content than its own form.

It is enough for Hilferding, then, to go back to the very appearance of the forms of exchange, that is, to the appearance of the forms of the market, in order to complete his inversion:

> Certainly, the monopoly price can be fixed empirically, but its level cannot be recognized objectively and theoretically but only conceived psychologically and subjectively.[238]

Once again, from the bowels of Marxist political economy spring the worst vulgarities of neoclassical economics. For Hilferding, the free consciousness and will of the monopolist is not a necessary concrete form of consciousness and will alienated by the performance of social labor

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[234] Ibid, p. 16.
[235] Ibid, p. 18.
[236] Ibid, p. 20.
[237] Ibid, p. 21.
[238] Ibid, p. 257.

privately and independently. On the contrary, it conceives of the free exercise of the monopolist's conscience and will in the choice between producing more or less in order to sell at a lower or higher price, as the one that determines, at his discretion, the unity of social production and consumption. Of course, he does not lack the imputation of his inversions to Marx:

> Classical economics, in which we also include Marx, has eliminated by that is, from their deductions the monopoly price, the price of commodities that cannot be raised at whim.[239]

Having made the commodity owner, as a monopolist, the bearer of an abstractly free consciousness and will, Hilferding has only to do the same with that of the commodity producer as worker:

> ... The triumph [of the proletariat] can only come out of the continuous struggle against this policy [that of finance capital], because only the proletariat can then be the heir of the defeat to which this policy must lead, bearing in mind that it is a question of a political and social collapse and not an economic one, which is by no means a rational concept.[240]

Here, Marxist political economy contrasts, already in a crude way, the immediate forms that the organization of social production, the economic forms, takes with this social organization itself, with the social forms. But such nonsense has Hilferding without care. Both being converted, necessary concrete form and content, into two existences mutually external to each other, the second can be presented as if it sprang from the action of abstractly free antagonistic wills. Thanks to this, Hilferding has succeeded in completing his reversal of the determination of the social being of the commodity producers, conceiving it as the confrontation between a free consciousness that seeks to impose its domination on another, which resists this domination, which results in the overcoming of the capitalist mode of production.

10.3 From Political Economy to Marxist Philosophy

The inversion of the materiality of abstract labour as a specific attribute of the capitalist mode of production and, on the basis of this, the naturalization of free consciousness by abstracting it from its determination as a necessary concrete form of alienated consciousness, constitutes the axis of this second branch of Marxist political economy that we have just deployed. But it is not his exclusive patrimony. The very reversal of the critique of political economy into Marxist political economy implies the emergence of Marxist philosophy. In my previous work, I developed the necessary unity between science based on the logical representation of the real and philosophy as the form of alienated consciousness which, while

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[239] Hilferding, Financial Capital, op. cit., p. 257.
[240] Ibid, p. 415.

allowing one to act objectively on the concrete by transforming quantitative differences into qualitative differences, reproduces the appearance of being a purely free consciousness.[241] Philosophy is the part of this unity that is concerned with conceiving this apparent consciousness as an attribute inherent by nature in the human person, and then placing it at the very basis of social being. So it is not common for Marxist philosophy to stop to consider the determinations of the value of commodities. But when it does so, it immediately inverts the materiality of abstract labor, in order to present it as a social form proper to the capitalist mode of production.

10.3.1 Lukács

Lukács states that its development begins "presupposing Marx's economic analysis",[242] to conclude:

> The universality of the commodity form thus conditions, both subjectively and objectively, an abstraction of human labour, which becomes a thing in commodities. ... The only thing that matters here is to see that the labour proper to the capitalist division of labour - abstract, equal, comparable labour, measurable with ever-increasing accuracy by the socially necessary labour-time - arises both as a product and as a presupposition of capitalist production, in the course of its development.[243]

For Lukács, it is not that the material expenditure of human labour power in general - that is, abstract labour - is represented as the attribute of social use-values of being exchangeable objects - that is, as the value of commodities - because social labour is carried out privately and independently. Conversely, the general existence of exchange—that is, the "universality of the commodity form"—abstracted into its own appearance, engenders abstract labor. Thus, the materiality of abstract labor, as such inherent in human labor, whatever the social form in which it is organized, is torn from view.

Once the materiality of abstract labour is erased, the fact that what is at stake in the form of a commodity is the material unity of the process of social metabolism, a unity that imposes itself on the basis of the private and independent realization of social labour, is erased. The integral determination of the consciousness of the commodity producers as the necessary concrete form in which this material unity is realized through the voluntary actions immediately independent of them is thus obliterated. The consciousness and will of commodity producers are no longer the concrete forms of personification of the reified general social relation. Now, they come to be conceived as entities that pre-exist externally to the commodity form itself, since only in such a condition can a relation be conceived in which this form "influences" them more or less "decisively":

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[241] Iñigo Carrera, Capital: Historical Reason, Revolutionary Subject and Consciousness, op. cit., pp. 250-252.

[242] Georg Lukács, History and Class Consciousness. Estudios de dialectica marxista, Mexico City: Editorial Grijalbo, 1969, p. 90.

[243] Ibid, p. 94.

The difference between a society in which the commodity form is the dominant one, the form which decisively influences all the manifestations of life, and a society in which this form appears only episodically, is rather a qualitative difference.

> ... and it is only in the course of this [capitalist production], therefore, [abstract, equal, comparable labour, measurable with ever increasing exactitude by the socially necessary labour-time] becomes a social category, which decisively influences the form of the objectivity of both the objects and the subjects of the society thus born. of its relation to nature and of the relations possible in it between men.[244]

On the basis of converting abstract labour into a historical form that springs from the general exchange of commodities, Lukács has reproduced the appearance of externality between consciousness and will in the capitalist mode of production, on the one hand, and reified social relations, on the other. The circle closes with the projection of this same exteriority to the determination of the capitalist mode of production as a historical form, where the conscious action capable of overcoming reification does not appear to spring from it, but from an impulse external to it:

> The "kingdom of freedom", the end of the "prehistory of humanity" means precisely that the reified relations between men, the objectification, begin to lose their power over man and to hand him over to him. The closer this process comes to its goal, the more important is the consciousness that the proletariat has of its task, its class consciousness, and the more intensely and immediately this consciousness has to determine its actions. For the blind power of the motive forces proceeds "automatically" towards its goal, its self-dissolution, only until the moment arrives when that point is in attainable proximity. Once the moment of the transition to the "realm of freedom" has been objectively given, the situation is manifested precisely in the fact that the blind forces are blind in the literal sense, and are pushing towards the abyss with increasing and apparently irresistible energy, while only the conscious will of the proletariat can protect humanity from catastrophe. In other words: once the definitive economic crisis of capitalism has been inaugurated, the fate of the revolution (and with it, that of humanity) depends on the ideological maturity of the proletariat, on its class consciousness.[245]

To say that "objectification begins to lose its power over man and to give him over to him" is the same as saying that the consciousness of the human beings who are the bearers of the overcoming of objectification begins to objectively discover its determination as such a reified consciousness. Therefore, to affirm that, "the closer this process approaches its goal, the more important is the consciousness that the proletariat has of its task, etc." is, above all, a crude tautology: to advance in overcoming reification is nothing other than to advance in the

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[244] Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, op. cit., pp. 90-91 and 94-95.
[245] Ibid, p. 76.

development of consciousness about the necessity of one's own action as a way of governing it. So the statement in question can only make sense to those who conceive of the development of the consciousness and action of the proletariat as springing from outside the development of reification itself. And in fact Lukács is only moving in this direction, erasing the fact that "automatic force" exists only in the concrete form of the conscious and voluntary action of individuals. Thus, "the blind power of the motive forces" does not consist in the fact that they themselves engender revolutionary consciousness, as a necessary concrete form of self-realization. On the contrary, in the world conceived by Lukács, in which social forms have been emptied of determination by the materiality of labor and, conversely, it is they that determine labor as abstract by themselves, revolutionary consciousness must be generated by itself.

To say that there is "the objective moment of transition to the realm of freedom" is the same as to say that the moment is given when the proletariat transcends its reified consciousness, and therefore the moment when the process of social metabolism ceases to be organized through commodity exchange. But not for Lukács'. For him, on the one hand, there is an objective moment alien to any subject, on the other, a subject alien to objective determination. On the one hand, there is a reified social relationship that has entered into terminal crisis because consciousness is definitively freeing itself from the "influence" that this relationship exerts on it. On the other hand, there is a reified social relationship that has become independent even of its content as a way of organizing the human process of social metabolism. So much so that from this externality of his with respect to every social being, he threatens to unload himself like an "abyss" and "catastrophe" on a humanity, so empty of social being, that it needs to be protected by a "conscious will of the proletariat" no less external. On the one hand, the "definitive crisis of capitalism" – that is, the absolute step in which the consciousness that confronts its own product as a social power that is alien to it and dominates it, transcends itself by asserting itself as a consciousness that has objectively appropriated its own social powers and governs them accordingly – is reduced to an abstract "economic crisis". On the other hand, the outcome of this crisis is not determined by the development of the objective consciousness which takes concrete form in it, but "depends on the ideological maturity of the proletariat."[246]

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[246] The capitalist mode of production is nothing but a concrete historical way of organizing the materiality of the process of human metabolism. As such, it is a specific way of realizing the generically inherent necessity of every living subject – namely, the development of his capacity to appropriate the environment under the concrete, properly human form of the development of the productive forces of social labor. Therefore, to affirm that the capitalist mode of production has reached its "definitive", i.e., final crisis, leading to the "abyss" or "catastrophe", implies one of two possibilities. The first is that the instantaneous end of human life has been reached, and with it that of every mode of production. Thus one would arrive at the peculiar conclusion that the way in which the human capacity to transform the environment into a means for itself was developed would have carried within itself as an ultimate necessity its opposite, the need to annihilate all human life at a single blow. The second possibility implies that the reproduction of human life continues, if only to advance in its own annihilation. In this case, there should still be production and, therefore, a way of organizing it. Of course, it could no longer be a question of the capitalist mode of production, because it has been announced that its crisis has been "definitive". So, which modes of production are "the abyss" or "the catastrophe"? What is the immediate object with which social labor is governed in them? How is the total labor power of society assigned under the different concrete useful forms of labor to be performed by different individuals in such a way

The question immediately arises: what is the source of this "ideological maturity"? Of course, such a source cannot be found in the crisis itself, since Lukács has postulated that it lacks the need to be, in itself, the way to impose the conscious organization of social production. Lukács can only locate it in ideological consciousness itself, that is, in the "principles" that must govern the action of the proletariat:

> Any tactic of the proletariat which does not obey principles or lacks them reduces historical materialism to mere "ideology," imposes on the proletariat a bourgeois (or petty-bourgeois) method of struggle, and deprives it of its best strength.[247]

But what are "principles"? First of all, principles are not an abstractly natural way of governing conscious human action. They are a historically specific form of consciousness. It is the form of consciousness in which the subject confronts his own social being under the appearance of being an "ought to be" imposed, from the social exterior, on his condition as a naturally free individual. As is obvious by now, to appeal to principles as determinants of the conscious action that overcomes the capitalist mode of production is nothing more than an appeal to the consciousness of the commodity producer incapable of recognizing his alienation when he stops before the appearance of his abstract natural freedom. Lukács intends to present as the foundation of an action whose revolutionary essence consists in starting from the consciousness of one's own alienation, a consciousness which is the opposite of it, that is, a consciousness whose alienation is reproduced through the conception of itself as a purely free consciousness. Not surprisingly, ideological consciousness is the opposite of scientific, objective consciousness. The realm that goes beyond Lukács's "attainable proximity," where it is no longer possible to escape one's own contradictions by calling them "dialectical," is none other than that of the conception of the apparent free consciousness of the commodity producer as if it were a natural form of human consciousness.

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as to reproduce the process of social metabolism? Let's not wait for a response from Lukács.

[247] Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, op. cit., pp. 76-77.

CHAPTER 11

The alienated consciousness that advances in its freedom by knowing itself in its alienation

11.1 The alienated consciousness that denies itself as such by knowing itself in its historically specific determination

Classical, apologetic or critical, what defines political economy is that it stops at the appearances presented by the value of commodities, in order to empty it of its historical specificity. Thus, it empties the free consciousness and will of their historically specific determination as necessary concrete forms of alienated consciousness and will. Thus it presents the resulting abstract free consciousness and will as if they were the natural, ahistorical form of human consciousness and will.

As a necessary concrete form of action that aims to transform existing society, the critique of political economy begins by discovering the commodity as the simplest form of the general social relation in the capitalist mode of production. Thus he discovers free consciousness and will as historically specific attributes of commodity production, which engenders them as necessary concrete forms of consciousness and will alienated in the commodity. Thus, he discovers the free consciousness and will in which the alienated consciousness and will of the commodity producers are realized, as the general form of consciousness and the will proper to this mode of production.

All consciousness and will, free from the bonds of personal dependence, which historical development has produced up to the present, is determined as such by being the necessary concrete form of consciousness and will alienated in the commodity.

Let us dwell again on the generically proper determination of the process of human metabolism, work. Work is the moment in the process of social metabolism in which the individual subjects of this process expend their bodies to transform the materiality of the objects that constitute their environment, so as to make them suitable to be consumed in the reproduction of the individual existences of those same subjects. At the beginning of human development, the producer governs his expenditure of individual labor power through purely animal knowledge about the potentiality of this expenditure with respect to the potentiality contained in the object, which is to be transformed, to satisfy individual human consumption.

The development of the potentiality of human labor, that is, the realization of the natural necessity inherent in the process of human social metabolism, is effected through the production of means of production. And the multiplication of this production, the production of means of production to produce means of production for etc., which will be used in the production of means of subsistence, implies the increasing separation of the moment of labor from the moment of individual consumption. There comes a point, in this separation, when the individual can no longer govern his expenditure of human labor power only by knowing the potentiality of his immediate action with respect to the mediate potentiality of the object to

satisfy some individual consumption. In order to govern productive action, individual knowledge needs to know itself as a process of knowledge of the potentiality of the transformative action of the environment itself. The subject who governs his individual action, knowing its potentiality with respect to the potentiality of its object, determines himself as a subject who knows himself as such. Through the development of his productive powers, the human being determines himself as a subject possessing consciousness, as a conscious subject. Now, he can act knowing himself to be the subject of his own action, he can act voluntarily. Labor has thus been determined, as properly human, as the expenditure of the human body and mind made consciously and voluntarily, which is applied to the means of production, that is, to the tool with which it operates by transforming the object of labor, to convert this object into a new use-value suitable for other productive consumption or for individual consumption.

This gigantic leap forward in the development of the productive forces of social labour as an attribute carried directly in the person of the individual worker is the result of a slow process of transformation of animal life into human life. But, at the same time, because of its content and potentiality, it necessarily constitutes a primitive step in the development of the process of human social metabolism. It occurs when the exploitation of the individual who works for the individual who does not work has not yet been able to develop, as his existence is the fundamental material basis on which this exploitation is built. It is therefore necessarily the product of the primitive organization of the labor of society through the allocation of individual labor forces to each concrete task, as a power that emanates directly from the natural belonging of the individual to his society. In this primitive communism, the individual does not realize his social relation as the exercise of his free individuality, that is, through the exercise of a consciousness and will that knows its determinations as the individual bearer of social labor power. On the contrary, their individuality is reduced to the conscious and voluntary exercise of their bonds of personal dependence. The individual of primitive communism is so tied to them that he is even prevented from recognizing, in another individual outside his community, the attributes of a human being naturally similar to himself. His own social being transcends the reach of his consciousness and will. So it is presented to him as a natural force alien to him, which dominates him in his conscious and voluntary individuality. With this, he will advance in the knowledge of his own determinations, he will develop his consciousness, under the concrete form of religious consciousness; that is, of a consciousness that can only see the material realization of its own human powers, as if they were the realization of powers alien to it. He conceives them as fantastic powers, attributed to nature, to which the conscience and will itself are subjected. The will itself presents itself to consciousness as the incarnation of a divine will. Being free from exploitation by another is not synonymous with having a free conscience and free will, that is, with having a consciousness that knows its own determinations to the point of being able to realize them as the exercise of its own will.

Let us pass, from primitive communism, to the fullness of the exploitation of the worker by the non-worker. In a slave or feudal society, which presents no interstices for the production of commodities, the slave or serf fleeing from the exploitation of his master or master does not simply become individuals free from all direct personal subjection. On the contrary, they can only survive if they find a social space where they can incorporate, as their personal attribute, new direct relations of social interdependence that determine them as members of their new

community in the process of organizing the reproduction of their lives. Yet, in their community of origin, they will never cease to be a slave or a fugitive serf, since their status as a slave or serf appears to be more inherent to their personal nature than the color of their hair.

Contrary to what those who stop at appearances would have you believe, simply free consciousness, consciousness that supposedly determines itself as free from all direct personal dependence, has not had, and does not have, objective existence. It is only an ideological construction, the product of the fetishism of the commodity. Its social role is the reproduction of this fetishism itself, however much those who cultivate this inversion conceive of it as the absolute critique of the capitalist mode of production.[248]

Up to this point, it may seem that we have been referring to the producers of goods as if they were simply third parties, the subject of our investigation. But, when we set out our starting point in the transformative action of our social organization, we had already put the axis in our own conscious action. We wondered about the determination of our conscience and will. And, in the search for this determination, we find our own determination as producers of commodities; that is, as individuals whose free consciousness and will are the way in which the alienation of their consciousness and will exists. This is not simply the form that the conscience and will of others takes. It is, above all, the form that my own consciousness and will have. I am the one who has a free consciousness and will that is determined as the necessary concrete way to realize his alienated consciousness and will. I am the one who, as a free individual, can organize his active participation in the process of social metabolism only insofar as he assumes the social powers of his own conscious and voluntary action as a social attribute that is alien to him, that belongs to the material product of his labor. It is my conscious and voluntary action that has for every social power the personification of my commodity. This is my conscience. And it is the consciousness of the one who is reading this text, using it as a tool in the process of discovering for himself the concrete determinations of his consciousness and will as a social subject in the capitalist mode of production. It may not be amusing to one who has torn away, convinced by his own appearance, of being an abstract individual, naturally free. But this is what it is.

To answer the question about the need for our own conscious action to transform society, we arrive analytically at the commodity, and this became the starting point for the unfolding of the historically specific determination of this need to act consciously. It would seem that we have passed from consciousness to a thing, and from the thing back to consciousness. Is it that, in the search for its determination, we have started from our consciousness and will, and then left it, and finally returned to it? Certainly not. Our own conscience and will have never ceased to be the immediate object of our investigation; therefore, the development of his determination has been our common thread from beginning to end. What happens is that, as producers of commodities, our alienated consciousness and will do not

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[248] The role played by literature and cinema, both historical and science fiction, in this sense is remarkable. Towards the past, the individuals of the primitive community, of the slave society, and of feudalism are presented as if they by nature enjoyed the freedom proper to the commodity producer, and this freedom had been unnaturally curtailed from them. Towards the future, we are presented with societies where work no longer even exists, but in which individuals have all the personal attributes of commodity producers.

simply reside in our minds. They have, at the same time, a material existence, an objective existence, external to our person: the commodity. When we see the commodity, money, what we are seeing is the objectified form that our free consciousness and will have, that is, we are seeing our consciousness and will in the purity of their alienation. And only from this objectified form can our free consciousness and will begin to confront themselves in order to discover their determination as alienated forms of consciousness and will. The unfolding of the determinations of the commodity as the simplest specific concrete of the capitalist mode of production is nothing other than the unfolding of the determinations of consciousness and will alienated in their own material product.

From its first paragraph - "In societies where the capitalist mode of production prevails, wealth is presented as an immense accumulation of commodities" - Capital begins to unfold the determinations of alienated consciousness. And he can only do it. Capital is the alienated consciousness that, for the first time in history, discovers itself as such, behind the appearance of its abstract freedom, as it advances in the development of its own determinations from confronting itself in the purity of its reified form. And Capital is this consciousness, produced in a social form: that of a text in which the expenditure of an individual's labor power has been materialized, the product of which is available to be appropriated by other individuals in the process of reproducing themselves as subjects of the process of social metabolism.

In my previous work I analyzed how Marx advances in the discovery and exposition of the alienated consciousness that takes the concrete form of free consciousness, from the Manuscripts of 1844 to Capital.[249] Very synthetically, in the former, Marx starts from the categories of political economy, until he discovers through them the alienated character of labor in the capitalist mode of production. But, precisely because of the starting point it has taken, it clashes with the figure of the non-worker as the determinant of the alienation of the worker through the private ownership of the means of production. From there, already in the same Manuscripts, Marx leaves this appearance behind to pass, from private property, to the private organization of social labor as the content of alienation and, from there, to the form that alienated consciousness takes as a logical representation, that is, when it objectively confronts the knowledge of its own determinations without transcending its appearance of abstractly free consciousness. But it is only in the Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, and definitely in Capital, that Marx succeeds in starting from the simplest objectified form that alienated consciousness takes in the capitalist mode of production, the commodity. It thus shows that the determination of alienated consciousness is independent of the presence of the person of the non-worker, directly concerning the subjectivity of the worker himself. It is then the proper movement of the objectified form that alienated consciousness takes that lays bare the necessity of the categories of political economy as concrete expressions of that same consciousness. Moreover, Marx only succeeds in giving a finished form to this unfolding in the second edition of the first chapter of Capital. In the first edition, there are still steps which, corresponding to the proper movement of the commodity that is being reproduced by thought, are presented as if they arose from a necessity inherent in thought itself.

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[249] Juan Iñigo Carrera, Capital: Historical Reason, Revolutionary Subject and Consciousness, Buenos Aires: Ediciones Imago Mundi, 2013, pp. 319-320.

11.2 The alienated consciousness imprisoned by its alienation as a pure critique of it, that is, again on Marxist philosophy

The question presents itself very differently from the point of view, not of Marxist political economy, but of Marxist philosophy. Moreover, it is not a philosophy that, like Lukács's, claims to start "by presupposing Marx's economic analysis". It is a philosophy that defines its field as philosophically self-contained.

11.2.1 Althusser

Althusser starts by stating that:

> We have read Capital as Philosophers [...] To read Capital as a Philosopher is exactly to ask oneself about the specific object of a scientific discourse and the specific relationship between that discourse and its object...[250]

Let's see where this philosophical interest goes:

> By applying the conceptual system of Capital to the conceptual system of Marx's youthful work that is the Manuscripts of 1844, the theoretical break [*coupure*] between the two texts is made possible. In this way, precisely by applying the concept of "wage labour" (which appears in Capital) to the concept of "alienated labour" (which appears in the Manuscripts of 1844), the ideological, not scientific, character of the concept of "alienated labour" and, consequently, of the concept of "alienation" that sustains it becomes visible.[251]

Althusser cannot avoid the evidence that the "object" of Marx's "discourse" is alienated consciousness insofar as it is presented to him in its immediate form as a subjective attribute. But, as a good philosopher, the first thing he does is to empty the question of its real content. He presents it as if it existed only in a world made of concepts: it is the "concept of alienation", the "concept of alienated labour". In this field, it seems to him that it is enough to declare that alienation has no real existence other than being the conceptual product of a naturalization of the human being, of a "humanism," in order to expel it from "scientific discourse."

One might think that Althusser will find it more difficult to get rid of alienated consciousness as soon as Marx presents it to him with the forcefulness of tearing away from its objectified form in the product of labor and, therefore, as soon as he presents labor itself as an activity alienated by the social powers of its material product. But the opposite is true. Now, the alienated consciousness starts hidden behind its objectified form in the commodity, and can

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[250] Louis Althusser, "From Capital to Marx's Philosophy," in Para leer "Capital," ed. by Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, Mexico, DF: Siglo XXI, 2000, p. 19.

[251] Louis Althusser, Philosophy as a Weapon of the Revolution, Cordoba: Notebooks of Past and Present, 1972, vol. 4, pp. 95-96.

only be discovered in the subjectivity of the producers by accompanying step by step the movement of the commodity itself. At the same time, philosophical reading only knows how to start from the appearance of its own abstract freedom. So, with no other recourse than the grandiloquent superficiality of this reading, Althusser inverts the result of his own myopia. According to him, in Capital there are no traces of the alienation of consciousness as an attribute of its own material product. Such is the "Marxist Marx".[252] In Althusserian version:

> In the works of his youth and in The German Ideology, for example, Marx speaks abundantly and directly of philosophy and ideology, but he speaks very little, if at all, of this subject in Capital.[253]

However, the evidence that the unfolding of alienated consciousness constitutes the very starting point of Capital continues to haunt Althusser. Barely two years after the above was written, the "Marxist Marx" has been removed from the first complete section of volume I:

> From my point of view, it is not possible to begin (and only begin) to understand section I only after having read and reread the whole of book I from section II. This advice is more than advice: with all due respect to my readers, it is a recommendation that I allow myself to present as an imperative recommendation. ... If you begin reading Book I at the beginning, that is, in section I, either you do not understand and abandon it, or you think you understand, which is all the more serious because there is a great probability that you have understood something very different from what you have to understand.[254]

What, according to Althusser, is "what needs to be understood"?

A knowledge of the remaining three books makes it possible to solve a certain number of the very serious theoretical difficulties of Book I, especially those concentrated in the terrible Section I (The Commodity and Money) around the famous theory of "labor value." ... When Book I of Capital (1867) appears, there are still traces of Hegelian influence. ... The last trace of Hegel's influence, and this time flagrant and extremely harmful (since all the theoreticians of "reification" and "alienation" have found in it with which to “find” their idealist interpretations of Marx's thought): the theory of fetishism.[255]

What is the need for Althusser's eagerness to produce a "Marxist Marx" at the cost of expelling Marx from the unity of his own works? The relations which commodity producers establish among themselves in order to organize the allocation of their social labour-power, their social relations of production, take the concrete form of social relations between things. If knowledge stops at this appearance, people do not seem to enter into social relations with each other. They only seem to assert themselves immediately in their condition as persons within

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[252] Ibid, pp. 90-91.

[253] Ibid, p. 90.

[254] Louis Althusser, "Guide to Reading Capital (Preface to the French Edition of Book I of Capital)," in Dialectics. Journal of Philosophy and Social Theory, n. 0 2 (October 1992), p. 25.

[255] Althusser, Philosophy as a Weapon of the Revolution, op. cit., pp. 29, 31-32.

their private processes of individual labour and consumption, insofar as they enter into a material relationship with their means of production and their products. As we have already seen, neoclassical economics takes advantage of this appearance to invert the social relations of production as if they were relations that are born of the privately established relations between people and things. In his philosophical world, Althusser begins by resorting to this same type of inversion:

> The relations of the agents of production to each other are the result of the typical relations which they establish with the means of production (object, instrument), and of their distribution into groups defined and functionally located in their relations with the means of production by the economic structure.[256]

From this reversal, the determination of the consciousness of the direct producer in the capitalist mode of production no longer seems to arise from his condition as a producer of commodities. That is, it does not seem to be born of his condition as an individual who has full control over his individual labor process, but who lacks control over its social powers and who, therefore, confronts these social powers as if they were an attribute of the product of his labor that dominate him. Thus, the fact that the free consciousness of the commodity producer is the concrete form of his consciousness alienated in the product of his labour is obliterated.

Althusser takes a new step in the abstraction of free consciousness from its determination by alienation in the commodity, declaring objective consciousness, i.e., science, to be a "discourse without a subject":

> That the author, in writing the lines of a discourse that claims to be scientific, is completely absent, as a "subject", from "his" scientific discourse (for all scientific discourse is by definition a discourse without a subject and there is only a "subject of science" in an ideology of science)...[257]

Thus, Althusser forbids the free consciousness of the commodity producer to constitute itself as the subject of its own development, discovering itself as the necessary form of alienated consciousness. A prohibition that has as its counterpart that, if the subject insists on having a conscience, it is condemned to be a prisoner of its own appearances, to be an ideology, for all its natural eternity:

> We say that the category of subject is constitutive of every ideology, but we add at once that the category of subject is constitutive of every ideology only insofar as every ideology has as its function (function that defines it) the "constitution" of concrete individuals into subjects. It is necessary to keep in mind that both the author of these lines and the reader who reads them are subjects and, therefore, ideological subjects

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[256] Louis Althusser, «The Object of Capital», in Para leer «El capital», ed. by Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, Mexico, DF: Siglo XXI, 2000, p. 191.

[257] Louis Althusser, Ideología y aparatos ideológicos del Estado, Buenos Aires: Nueva Visión, 2003, pp. 52-53.

> (tautological proposition), that is to say that both the author and the reader of these lines live "spontaneously" or "naturally" in ideology, in the sense in which we have said that "man is by nature an ideological animal".
> ... Ideology is eternal, just like the unconscious, and I will add that this comparison seems to me theoretically justified by the fact that the eternity of the unconscious is in relation to the eternity of ideology in general.[258]

Althusser is already in a position to take his inversion of the relations of production as if they arose from the relation between the worker and the means of production, in order to present the determination of the consciousness of the direct producer specifically inherent in the capitalist mode of production, as if it were born only from the wage-earning form with which this producer comes into contact with the means of production in order to carry out his work. From this Althusser concludes that this form imposes on the consciousness of the direct producer the "submission to the dominant ideology", which, in turn, has as its determination the "assurance of the predominance of the ruling class":

> Stating this fact in a more scientific language, we will say that the reproduction of labor power requires not only a reproduction of its qualification but, at the same time, the reproduction of its submission to the rules of the established order, that is, a reproduction of its submission to the dominant ideology on the part of the agents of exploitation and repression. so that they may also ensure "by word" the predominance of the ruling class.[259]

Whatever the mode of production, consciousness and will are nothing but the concrete ways of realizing the organization of the process of social metabolism through the actions of individuals. Therefore, the consciousness and will of human beings are the concrete forms that their social being takes through their individual subjectivities. In the capitalist mode of production, the alienation of consciousness from the direct producers does not arise from the antagonistic relation between the working class and the capitalist class, but from the commodity form itself which takes the product of labour as the general social bond. As we shall see later, the class struggle is the necessary concrete form in which the organization of the process of social metabolism is carried out as an alienated attribute in the product of social labor.

But, as we saw earlier, in this mode of production, commodity producers confront their own social being under the guise of being a determination external to themselves, which seems to them to impose itself on their true free subjectivity. Althusser does nothing but reproduce this appearance. The assertion that the worker must submit his consciousness to the "dominant ideology," to "the rules of the established order"—and not that his educational process is the way in which his social being produces his consciousness—presupposes that the worker possesses by himself a consciousness upon which this subjection is imposed. And if this consciousness happens to be subdued, it must first necessarily have been, by itself, a consciousness free from such subjection. That is, Althusser conceives of the working class as

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[258] Althusser, Ideology and Ideological Apparatuses of the State, op. cit., pp. 52, 42-43.
[259] Ibid, pp. 14-15.

having a free consciousness of its own, on which the action of the "ideological apparatuses of the state" is externally imposed, where the entire content of the organization of the materiality of the process of social metabolism appears reduced to "ensuring [...] the predominance of the ruling class."

On the one hand, Althusser has reduced the materiality of the organization of the process of social metabolism to having no content other than the appearances of the predominance of the ruling class. On the other hand, it has conceived of social relations under the alienated appearance of being relations between people and things. Althusser has converted every development of content in its necessary concrete forms into a jumble of forms put forward as contents, and of contents replaced by their ideological appearances. The only need that Althusser can expose is that of building a fantastic world, empty of all need. In it, everything determines everything, everything is "overdetermined".[260] Therefore, nothing determines anything:

> We will say that the materialism of encounter is also based entirely on the negation of the End, of all teleology, whether rational, mundane, moral, political or aesthetic. Finally, we will say that the materialism of encounter is not that of a subject (whether God or the proletariat), but that of a process without a subject but which imposes on the subjects (individuals or others) whom it dominates the order of its development without assignable end.[261]

Althusser's world is ready, at last, to give way to the conception of the naturally free consciousness of the working class. Although, this awareness will be overshadowed by another. Because, what is ready to enter with great fanfare, is the naturally free conscience of the Marxist philosophers. With Althusser at the head, or rather in Althusser's deranged head, Marxist philosophers hold in their hands the key to overcoming the capitalist mode of production. The question is, first, to transform the scientific knowledge developed by Marx into its opposite, into the negation of objective knowledge, that is, into a "doctrine"[262] (e.g., in a conception based on the natural authority of doctors), in a "new ideology." Second, to replace the "influence" exercised by bourgeois ideology on the natural "spontaneous" ideology of the working class by the influence of this new ideology:

> Everything thus refers to the transformation of the ideology of the working class: to the transformation that makes it [...] escape the influence of bourgeois ideology and subject it to a new influence, that of the Marxist science of society. ... to ensure the transformation of the "spontaneous" reformist ideology of the workers' movement into a new ideology...[263]

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[260] Althusser, "The Object of Capital," op. cit., p. 202.

[261] Althusser, "The Object of Capital," op. cit., p. 202. Louis Althusser, Para un materialismo azar, Madrid: Arena Libros, 2002, p. 56.

[262] Althusser, Philosophy as a Weapon of the Revolution, op. cit., p. 22.

[263] Ibid, p. 66.

Althusser expels the abstractly free subject of "humanist Marxism" out the door, only to sneak out of the window a consciousness whose freedom does not consist in objective knowledge of its own determinations, but in its free capacity to choose how to imagine the character of its relations to things, what ideology is to influence it. Later we shall see again this abstractly free consciousness of structuralist Marxism after the "relative autonomy of the superstructure with respect to the base," the "reaction of the superstructure on the base." But we can already highlight a concrete political significance of Althusser's conception. When one starts from the recognition that the simplest specific determination of social labour in the capitalist mode of production is the private form with which it is carried out, and therefore when one starts from the recognition that free consciousness is the concrete form of alienated consciousness as a social attribute of the material product of this labour, There is something that is clear from the start. Namely, that the mere subsistence of the commodity form is indicating the continuity of the private character of labor and, with it, the continuity of the alienation of the consciousness proper to the capitalist mode of production. Only if one starts by tearing this evidence out of its head is it possible to conceive of a society where the product of social labour takes the form of commodities, as if it were the expression of the overtaking of the capitalist mode of production, as if it were a society where labour is carried out in a directly social way. We have already seen the rudeness with which the USSR's Handbook of Political Economy makes this inversion. As a contemporary theoretician of the French Communist Party, Althusser fuels the same inversion through the philosophical claim to erase the first section of Volume I of Capital.

11.2.2 Sartre

Sartre's humanist Marxism is another expression of Marxist philosophy, which claims to be located at the antipodes of Althusser's. As we have been seeing, human productive action, work, engenders consciousness as its necessary form of organization. The human being thus determines himself as free, because consciousness is the virtual appropriation of the potentiality of the determinations of one's own action, so that it realizes itself as the intentional end of the subject. Sartre can see the alienated consciousness that is known in its alienation as the negation of the negation of free consciousness. But it can do so only on condition that consciousness is torn from its determination as a necessary concrete form of organizing the materiality of the process of social metabolism. Freedom thus becomes a concept that springs from the very movement of consciousness:

> A man, that is, a freedom in possession of his destiny. [[opens footer]] This is what Marx himself admirably expounds in Economics and Philosophy. [[end of note]] This observation is valid for the revolutionary's ultimate goal. Beyond the rational organization of the collectivity, class science calls for a new humanism, it is an alienated freedom that has finally taken freedom. Socialism is nothing other than the means that will allow the reign of freedom to be realized; Materialist socialism is contradictory,

because socialism finally proposes a humanism that materialism makes inconceivable.[264]

To sustain the appearance he is constructing, Sartre needs to appeal to the exteriority of the dialectic of "on one side and on the other side." On the one hand, there is human consciousness, subjectivity; on the other, the organization of the process of social life, the world; and both are conceptually interrelated with each other. That is why, as soon as Marx begins to expose alienated consciousness on the basis of its objectified form as the bearer of the organization of social life – where the very form external to itself in which alienated consciousness is recognized makes impossible any illusion of externality with respect to its determination by the materiality of the process of social metabolism, all that occurs to Sartre is that the subjectivity. So naked is the weakness of its construction that it can only account for Marx's progress by resorting to the argument of ... Bad company:

> For reality to be revealed, it is necessary for a man to fight against it; in a word, the realism of the revolutionary demands at the same time the existence of the world and of subjectivity; moreover, it demands such a correlation of one and the other that it is not possible to conceive of a subjectivity on the margins of the world, nor a world that is not illuminated by the effort of a subjectivity. [[opens footnote] This was none other than Marx's view in 1844, before his ill-fated encounter with Engels [[end of note]].[265]

Structuralist or humanist, Marxist philosophy can have no other content than that of all philosophy: the reproduction of the appearance inherent in the alienated consciousness of the commodity producers of being a naturally free consciousness, posed as if this appearance sprang from the pure exercise of this natural freedom. Let us recall Marx's observation in this regard:

> The philosophical spirit is in its turn nothing but the alienated spirit of the world that thinks within its self-alienation, that is, that grasps itself in an abstract form.
> Which, in general, constitutes the essence of Philosophy, the alienation of man who knows himself, or the alienated science that thinks himself...[266]

11.3 The necessity of the alienated consciousness that advances in its freedom by knowing itself in its alienation

The discovery of the form of value of the product of social labour carried out privately and independently, that is, by personally free individuals, is nothing but the process in which alienated consciousness, acting through its concrete form of free science, which is confronted as such with the need to transform the world, it discovers itself in its condition of alienated consciousness. That is, in its free action, this consciousness discovers itself as its own opposite, the negation of free consciousness. But, as we have already seen, freedom consists in the

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[264] Jean Paul Sartre, Materialism and Revolution, Editorial Deucalion: Buenos Aires, 1954, p. 86.
[265] Sartre, Materialism and Revolution, op. cit., p. 89.
[266] Karl Marx, Manuscripts: Economics and Philosophy, Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1968, pp. 186-190.

knowledge of one's own determinations, in order to carry them out under the dominion of one's own will. Therefore, when alienated consciousness discovers itself as such alienated consciousness, what it is doing is determining itself as the alienated consciousness that knows itself in its own alienation. Consequently, it is determining itself as a free consciousness, as an alienated consciousness that affirms itself through its own negation. Thus, it is far from determining itself as a simply free consciousness. Just as alienated consciousness is the negation of free consciousness, so alienated consciousness which is known in its alienation is a free consciousness only as the negation of the negation of free consciousness. So, the discovery of its determination does not in any way free it from the necessity of continuing to submit to the domination of the social powers of the product of its labour, of continuing to act as the personification of the commodity. This, and no other, is our general social relation and, therefore, the determinant of our action as social subjects. Only that the condition of personification of the commodity has ceased to operate behind our backs.

We have seen that the alienated consciousness which stops at its appearance of being free and therefore conceives of itself as an abstractly free consciousness is but the basis of the fetishistic consciousness of the commodity producer. Through the actions governed by this apparently free consciousness, society assigns its total capacity for work to the various individual concrete jobs, so as to reproduce its metabolism process. Political economy sustains its appearance of scientific objectivity by dwelling on the exteriority of the concrete form, that is, on the externality of free consciousness, thus turning it into an abstraction. Marxist political economy and Marxist philosophy go back, from the critique of political economy, to the regeneration of the appearance of free consciousness abstracted from its determination as a concrete form of consciousness alienated in the commodity. All these conceptions reproduce the fetishism of the commodity under the appearance of being free from it, as its condition of objective knowledge makes it appear. They are concrete forms of the reproduction of consciousness through which the capacity to organize the process of social metabolism confronts the subjects of this process as an attribute of the product of their labor. At this point, we can thus account for the reason for their generalized and dominant existence, as forms of the alienated consciousness that governs the actions that carry the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production. However critical some of them may seem, they are powerless to transcend such reproduction insofar as this transcendence needs to be carried by an action that knows its own determination above all appearance.

As soon as we answer ourselves about the necessity of fetishistic consciousness, we cannot help wondering about the necessity of the form of our own consciousness. Where does our alienated consciousness get the need to affirm itself in its freedom through the discovery of its alienation? Since it is a consciousness alienated in the commodity, which, however much it recognizes itself as such, must continue to personify the social powers of the commodity, the answer can only be one: it is a consciousness which draws its necessity from the determinations of the commodity itself. The need of our consciousness to affirm itself in its freedom through knowing itself in its alienation does not arise from its condition of free consciousness, but from its alienated condition of personification of the commodity. Therefore, our conscious and voluntary action, which aims to transform the present organization of the process of social metabolism on the basis of being governed by the knowledge of its alienation, can only be the

way of realizing a necessity inherent in the commodity. What necessity can the commodity contain for it to be expressed in this form of action? All that we know so far of the commodity is its determination as the simplest concrete carrier of the organization of the process of social metabolism in the capitalist mode of production. Therefore, our alienated consciousness that knows its alienation can only be the bearer of the reproduction of this mode of production. But it is an alienated consciousness that has its specificity determined by the fact of knowing its own alienation and, therefore, it is an alienated consciousness that has its specificity determined as overcoming alienation. This specificity shows that our form of consciousness can have no other reason for existence than the fact that the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production carries within itself the need to transcend itself through the development of a voluntary action that is governed by the knowledge of its own determination above all appearance with respect to its freedom.

The question then arises as to what necessity the capitalist mode of production may have shown hitherto in this respect. Let us simply remember that the living subject has the need to constantly develop his capacity to appropriate the environment in which he finds himself. And let us remember that the natural process of human life has its generic determination in that it does not focus this development on the mutation of the body itself. On the contrary, the natural process of properly human life consists in the constant development of the capacity to act on the environment consciously and voluntarily, transforming it into a means for the process of social metabolism. That is, human natural history is the history of the development of the productive forces of social labor.

Without having gone further than the development of the necessity of the commodity as the concrete form of the general social relation in the capitalist mode of production, it has already shown us that there are two determinations which hinder the development of the productive forces of society. The first is synthesized in the normal waste of part of the labor power available to feed the process of social metabolism, because the social character of labor becomes apparent only after it has been performed. The second is carried out in the multiplication of the expenditure of human energy that consumes into the consciousness and will of the commodity producer the need to organize his individual work, making his apparent absolute independence the bearer of his general social interdependence.

Both limitations on the development of the productive forces of social labour arise from the private form in which it is carried out. But it is from this same form of private that the productive powers proper to individual free labor arise, that is, to individual labor whose specific social productive powers arise from the fact that its organization as such, that is, the knowledge of its immediately individual determinations and the execution of them, are an isolated attribute of the consciousness and will of the one who performs it. Of the social productive forces proper to individual free labour, the one that comes from the same form is not the least. This work is presented to the consciousness and will of the subject who performs it as a direct expression of the realization of his generically human attributes. That is, it is presented to the direct producer as the full realization of his capacity to act consciously and voluntarily in the transformation of nature outside him into a means for human life. And this affirmation of one's own individual human subjectivity is a material productive force of society, possessing, in itself, a specific historical power.

This power of individual free labour does not arise from its determination as an organ of social labour. On the contrary, it seems completely alien to this determination. What characterizes individual free labor is the absolute impotence of the conscience and the will of the one who performs it to control its social character.

We have then that the specific potentiality of the capitalist mode of production to develop the productive forces of society does not arise directly from the social powers of human labor. On the contrary, it arises from the very private character with which social labor is carried out in it. But the unfolding of this potentiality cannot be anything other than to take this character of the private beyond itself. And beyond the private form with which social labor is carried out, there is nothing other than the transformation of that form itself into directly social labor. Therefore, our starting point already tells us that, however much the capitalist mode of production necessarily appears as the empire of the private character of labor, its development can contain no other content than the fact that it is the history of the process of transformation of private labor into directly social free labor. But our starting point also tells us that this development of the productive forces of social labour through the socialization of free labour is carried as an attribute of private labour. Therefore, the history of this development can only be the history of the development of the limits to its own realization. Hence the development of consciousness, freed from its alienation in the commodity, can only take place as a negation of the negation of free consciousness. But hence also the development of the productive forces of society in the historically specific form of the development of human freedom - that is, the development of human freedom, of not being subject to the personal domination of another because of being subject to the domination of the social attributes of the product of one's own labour, to consist in not being subject to the personal domination of another because one has full control over one's own individual labor as an organ of social labor - has as a necessary form the overcoming of the capitalist mode of production.

However, knowing all this, we have hardly taken a first step as to what concrete form to give to our political action to overcome the capitalist mode of production. Because what really puts us in front of our starting point, the commodity, is that it is nothing more than the starting point for the concrete unfolding of this development. We need, therefore, to move forward.